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PREVIEWED!

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Ten seconds to lift-off. We take the ultimate space sim for a test flight



REVIEWED!

MYST 3

This year's blockbuster - but is it any good?



A LEGEND IS BORN...

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

First shots of the follow up to Age of Empires



next



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9 771326 564002

PLUS!

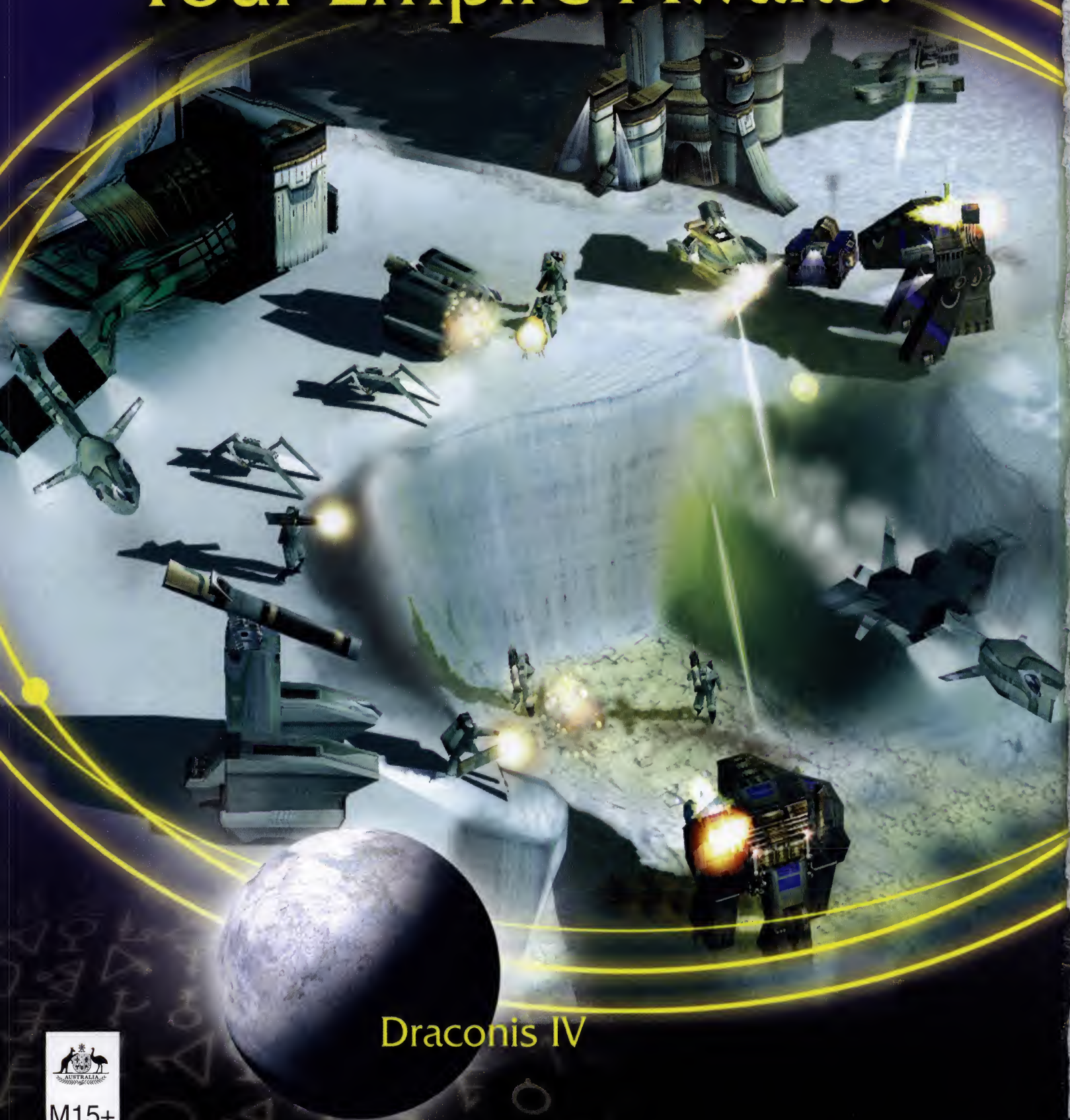
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Westwood
STUDIOS

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Screenshot of
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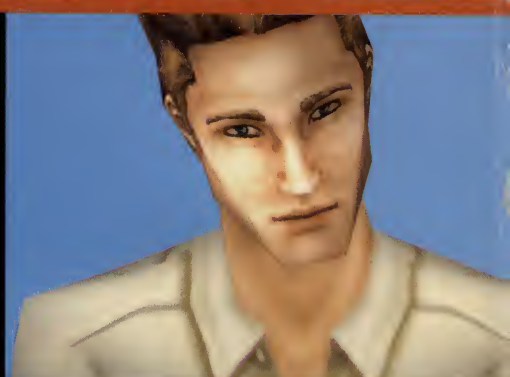


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THE SIMS ONLINE

Where do you take the best selling game in the world once it's smashed all the records and found a place in every gamer's home? You take it online of course. We've got the scoop on how the best little person game in history just got a whole lot better!



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LIVIN' IT UP IN LA



DAVID WILDGOOSE

System Shock 2 - you didn't need to smash them

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Black & White

By the time you read this, E3 2001 will have come and gone. For the uninitiated, E3 (or the Electronic Entertainment Expo) is event numero uno on the games industry calendar.

It's a vital annual 'meet and greet' (or 'booze and schmooze' to be accurate) for game developers, publishers, distributors, retailers and journalists from all over the planet. The latter is there to experience firsthand virtually every game to be released in the coming year - and beyond. Everyone else is there to do deals and hawk their wares.

But what's E3 really like? Well, there are more scantily-clad babes ("Do you mind if I take another photo?"), more redundant superlatives ("The lighting effects are just amazing"), more blue screens of death ("That'll be fixed in the final version"), and more C-list celebrities ("Hey, isn't that the guy who was in Diff'rent Strokes?") than anywhere on earth.

On the showfloor, there are game developers ready to debate at length to anyone in earshot why their new game, Generic Firstperson Shooter MkIV, is actually the next Half-Life. Or Deus Ex. Or Counter-Strike. Or all three at once.

In the media room, at dozens of PCs logged onto hotmail.com, there are countless journo's filing their 'exclusive' reports on precisely how

that non-playable, painstakingly-edited trailer of Duke Nukem Forever is going to "blow your mind". Or make you "spoooge your pants", if they're feeling cautious.

Inside the food courts, everyone who isn't American or British is vowing never to touch such really expensive and really bad food again; outside, the UK contingent seems capable of subsisting solely on Rizlas and Drum. Meanwhile, the Americans order a second helping of fries.

And everywhere you look there's a relentless influx of spectacles, expensive sneakers and bad t-shirts attempting to achieve some kind of critical mass of geekdom. It's an exciting place to be.

Yet what makes E3 so special each year is discovering that something special. It's about stumbling across that little gem of a game about which you previously knew nothing. It's about meeting its designer whose passion for his (or her) game is energising. It's about casting aside that earlier cynicism and feeling reinvigorated once more by what games can offer us.

For me, last year, that game was Sacrifice. I wonder what it will be this year? And that's the exciting thing: I have no idea what it might be... but you'll be able to read about it in the next issue.

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THE PC POWERPLAY CREW

This month we name our favourite crates...



ANTHONY FORDHAM

The Doom crate for its elegant simplicity

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Space Tripper



JOHN DEWHURST

Half-Life crates 'cos you *do* have to smash them

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Deus Ex



DANIEL STAINES

Not the TNT in Deus Ex that killed me, that's for sure!

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Summoner



HARRY MARAGOS

I'm working on a crate mod for UT

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Gore patch



CHANTAL BAIRLE

A crate of Mekong!

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Simon says...



MARCH STEPNIK

Any crate with a beard?

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Throne of Bhaal



JAMES COTTEE

I am a crate of fruit

WHAT I'M PLAYING

With your mind



TIMOTHY C. BEST

The crates of wrath

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Throne of Bhaal



CHRISTIAN READ

A crate of Torment

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Tropico



RYAN HOVINGH

A crate stocked with fine wine

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Fallout Tactics



GEORGE SOROPOS

Any crate in a storm

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Arcanum



ED FOX

I like my crates with four wheels

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Black & White

Sound
BLASTER
Live!

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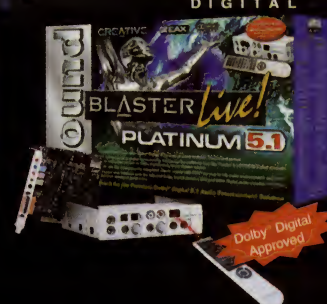
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DeskTop Theatre 5.1
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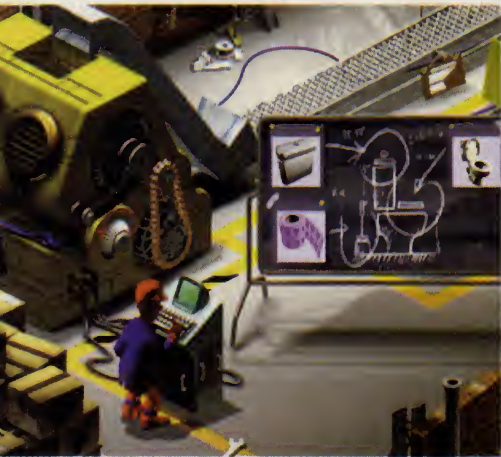
DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Monte Cristo

PUBLISHER
Take Two

AVAILABLE
3rd Qtr

URL
www.montecristogames.com





The "sim" is still the means of choice for the vast majority of people to experience anything. Sadly lacking lives of their own, millions have chosen to play out their domestic fantasies in *The Sims*, their godly fantasies in *Black & White* and their self-pollution fantasies in *Theme Park Public Holiday*.

Why get sunburnt when there's a beach on your PC? Why go to prison when you can rob a virtual bank? Is there a reason to pay for an education when you're perfectly qualified to sit at home? No good reason, I say! Now entrepreneurs can avoid the prohibitive costs of a business degree in favour of a measly hundred bucks for *Gadget Tycoon*.

A factory management sim should, by rights, be as much fun as surgery. *Gadget*

Tycoon could be the first enjoyable non-invasive procedure in gaming history. French developer Monte Cristo has created a cutesy cartoon style and easy navigation menus for your gaming pleasure.

As a college drop-out, you get to edit a national games magazine... I mean, start a production company. Mass produce overpriced trinkets and rake in the dollars. There are three models that can be produced: jet-powered in-line skates, a house-keeping robots or - wait for it - a high-tech toilet. Each of these products can be customised with over 30 components. All manner of crazy features will bring your product to the attention of the masses. A TV on the loo or better yet, a sawed-off holster in the skates - just what the kiddies need on their way to school.

Moral decisions

It's not all "Make the bowl bigger" and "Remove that open flame from the design" though. Important moral decisions must be made. How does one finance one's operation? Money from the man (a respected bank) or funds from the mafia? Does one research one's own inventions or pinch ideas from competitors? The love of money is all-consuming so it's a good thing I took philosophy for six months...

Obviously, the tone is light-hearted. Making a product is important but business isn't about hard work - it's about hard sell. All aspects of the operation need to be maintained, from development, manufacturing, financing and advertising. *Gadget Tycoon* will feature ten singleplayer missions, multiplayer and freeplay modes. Production begins late winter 2001.

John Dewhurst

WHY GADGET TYCOON DEMANDS A SECOND LOOK...



■ A new twist on the current sim craze

■ Learn all of the intricacies of big business

■ Build a toilet

■ Avoid a HECS debt

Real War

WELL, OBVIOUSLY IT'S NOT THAT REAL...

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Rival Interactive

PUBLISHER

Simon & Schuster

AVAILABLE

3rd Qtr 2001

URL

www.rivalinteractive.com



A room now
with an even
better view



Nice camouflage -
unless you're on
a brown bridge





War's a beach, especially when you get sand in your boots



War 'snow joke



Pedigree is important. When a game boasts the involvement of an industry specialist - retired policeman consults on SWAT 3, exotic dancer gives technical advice on Dead or Alive - the benefits gained can bring that game to new heights. Realism and content accuracy make authentic and compelling games. Real War doesn't so much take the mantra to Mohammed as be both the mantra and Mohammed. Allow me to explain.

This game was made for the US military. While possibly an insidious plot of said government to profit from our industry, a war game made by army folk is as close to authenticity as an RTS gets. Real War concerns the turmoil that erupts between the US forces and an independent (read: evil) coalition of forces known as the ILA.

True simulation

Real War is the commercial revision of Joint Force Employment (JFE), a realtime strategy game made for US military training. JFE was designed as a true simulation experience, making it more like work and less like a game. For the games market JFE needed to be drastically altered, so developer Rival Interactive comprised both military and game development experts to get the mixture just right. Real War is seeking that elusive perfect balance between games enjoyment and accurate strategy simulation.

The singleplayer game is an important link in the Real War chain, with progressive missions documenting the on-going struggle with the player alternately controlling each side. Of course, the multiplayer aspect is sure to be looked after, considering the company Real

War will keep (C&C comes to mind). Promises of four-way multiplayer with new modes of combat mean Real War looks well balanced.

Real War's modus is not just serious war. As much as strategy likes to maintain a stiff upper lip, a game's a game after all. Many of the elements that have puzzled newcomers to RTS games have been avoided. For example, unit names are not specifically designated: there are no F16Es - there are bombers. Supply lines (RTS catchphrase of the moment) will play a prominent role in the game, providing some of the realism. All the units in the game will be in current real-world combat use. Terrain will be 2D while all the units will be 3D.

An emphasis on simple, logical play and fast-paced combat could bring Real War - and realtime strategy - to an even greater audience.

John Dewhurst

WHY REAL WAR DEMANDS A SECOND LOOK...

■ Developed from military training game... yessir!

■ Emphasis on strategy and enjoyment as well

■ Jargon-less gameplay means easy access for all

■ Blast the hell out of the terrorists... and the US!

Spotlight

NEWS FROM ALL QUARTERS OF THE GLOBE

Sid Meier's Civilization III

DETAILS OF EPIC STRATEGY FINALLY REVEALED



While the graphics only marginally improve the original, there'll be much greater depth in design

The second sequel - at least from Sid Meier - in the Civilization series, should capitalise on sales of more than 4 million units. Firaxis, responsible for Alpha Centauri, is Sid Meier's own development house and is distinct from Activision who produced Civilization: Call to Power I & II. The name of Sid Meier, who created Civilization and its sequel, is enough to spark the considerable interest that surrounds Civ III, the newest in the famous strategy saga.

Reflecting a more contemporary view of international relations, Civ III features a greater emphasis on diplomacy. The conversational interface lends greater realism to negotiations and the new "bargaining table" allows for more delicate and involved diplomatic agreements. Further, Meier has expanded the ways to succeed in this third instalment. Many more factors influence power, not simply the traditional military might and empire size. New ways to win in Civ III include diplomatic finesse, cultural domination and economic might.



Trade is enhanced in Civ III, with trade routes playing an important role in income and diplomacy. Particular strategic resources are now needed to build special units, lending territory a new and more combat-relevant level of importance. Combat has been expanded to encompass new options of armies, air missions, bombardment siege, conscription and withdrawal from battle. Powerful leaders can be produced to lead an army to battle and whose greatness will affect subsequent generations.

Civ III will feature more powerful tools to build and manage your empire. Old

favourites return in the form of new wonders, technologies and civilisation specific units. Also promised are the new fully integrated concepts of culture, nationality and arts; the details of which are eagerly awaited by PCPP.

The essential multiplayer aspect of any strategy receives a make-over in the hands of Firaxis with promises of innovative approaches to online strategy. Also assured are the most polished, cutting edge animations, graphics and sound ever found in the genre and a streamlined, more accessible interface.



More Molyneux Magic

LIONHEAD PLANS THE FUTURE OF BLACK & WHITE

TOLKIEN

A MMORPG set in the Tolkien universe was finally confirmed as result of a lawsuit filed in developers MM3D against Sierra for breach of contract. Damages were set upwards of \$10 million but the developers wished to continue the project with Sierra. The suit was dropped less than a week later and work continues on the "Tolkien Online RPG".



Yet more love among the little people

Lionhead Studios is now hard at work completing the first patch for Black & White. Molyneux & co. will then begin work on a number of add-ons to Black & White, expanding the

basic game structure and adding some nice bonuses as well.

Expansion concepts include LAN Spawn, for LAN games with a single disc; Sandbox Land, a free play mode; Map Editor, for landscape design and Creature Skin Editor, for custom creature skins in multiplayer. Also, Creature Dancing, where your beast will get down to MP3 or CD music; Village Banter,

the ability to eavesdrop on the villagers when zoomed in close enough; and Soccer, where villagers will have a kick to if relaxation is high enough.

These free downloads will be rolled out on a regular basis and will be subject to voting by the Black & White community. Players can vote for favoured add-ons at the Black & White website, www.bwsite.com.



Judgment day for Doom

GAME COMPANIES TARGETED IN COLUMBINE LAWSUIT

Families of victims in the Columbine massacre have filed a multi-million dollar lawsuit against 25 media companies, many of whom manufacture or distribute videogames. Linda Sanders, wife of slain teacher David Sanders and two of his stepdaughters, filed the class action along with other families and claim that violent videogames and media contributed to the rampage by Klebold and Harris in April 1999.

The lawsuit contends the videogame industry, which is self-regulated, has failed to protect children from violent content and rather, these companies specifically target minors with violent games. Damages are named at upwards of US\$5 billion dollars.



The litigants' attorney states that money is not the main object of the lawsuit: "This is a class action that says that, ultimately, money ain't gonna do it". Named in the lawsuit are 25 companies, including Nintendo America, Sega of America, Sony Computer Entertainment and Time Warner Inc. (now AOL Time Warner) and id Software Inc. and GT Interactive Software Corp., creators and publishers of the game Doom.

In response, id CEO, Todd Hollenshead commented that the lawsuit was almost identical to a similar suit filed in 1999 after a shooting at a high school in Paducah, Kentucky. All claims were dismissed in that lawsuit. He said, "As with the Kentucky litigation, their claims are utterly without merit and we will defend ourselves."



Flogging a dead horse: another controversy, another Doom grab

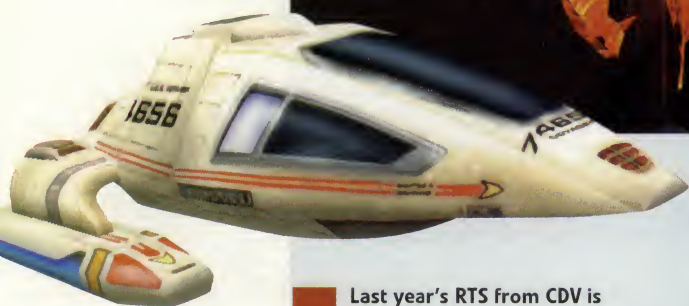
In related news, John Carmack received a letter from the family of a boy injured in Columbine, pleading for an end to the sale and distribution of violent games to minors. Perennial targets such as the game Doom and films like The Basketball Diaries (with its notorious massacre scene) have been named in this latest attack on the violent nature of the media.

DEUS GOTY

Eidos is producing a special Game of the Year edition of Deus Ex. Include is an updated version of the game, new Multi-person feature allowing the customisation of characters for multiplayer, an SDK of the developers' tools for level creation and a music CD of 20 remixed songs from the game.

Extra

THE ADD-ON COLUMN



Last year's RTS from CDV is receiving an expansion pack titled Sudden Strike Forever. The developer has listened to the feedback from fans of the game and added two important new features. Fans will now be able to play as the British and a fiddle around with a map and mission editor. The game will also include a total of 39 new missions along with new units and different ways to pl

Westwood has announced Yuri's Revenge, an add-on for Command & Conquer Red Alert 2. The expansion will feature new Allied & Soviet units, new solo campaigns, new co-operative campaigns, expanded online features and a new side led by Yuri, a telepathic warrior. Yuri featured in Red Alert 2 as a controllable unit. In this saga, he rises to lead his own his own forces with telepathic technologies. The game will be set in cities across the Earth as well as in space. A Christmas release is likely.

Contention over what Sierra would produce next for Tribes 2 has been put to rest as an expansion pack has been confirmed. Development is only in preliminary design work at the moment but

the expansion pack will feature a new vehicle as well as new maps and missions. It promises to broaden the depth of T2 apparently. We wait with eager abandon.

The Star Trek: Voyager Elite Force Expansion Pack will feature the voice of Jeri Ryan who plays Seven-of-Nine in the TV series. Seven-of-Nine dialogue using Ryan's voice will be added to the original game missions and will also feature in the expansion pack missions. It will also be released as a free downloadable patch.

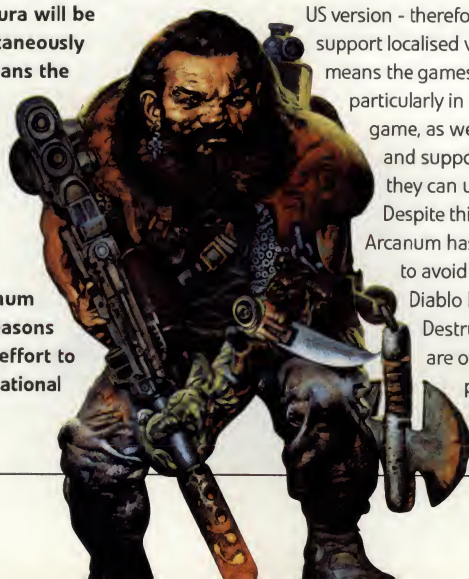
The Expansion Pack boasts a 3D recreation of Voyager with access to 10 decks of the ships, including the bridge, the sick bay, holodecks and more. Also included are 12 new models and 21 additional multiplayer maps as well as new multiplayer game modes.

Arcanum delayed

STEAMPUNK RPG SLIPS TO SPRING

Sierra Studios has announced that Arcanum: Of Steamworks and Magick Obscura will be worldwide simultaneously released. This means the May release in the U.S. will slip by four months. The official press release states effective localisation and support for Arcanum were the main reasons for the delay, an effort to combat the international "grey" market.

The uniform release of a localised product deters international retailing of the US version - therefore retailers support localised versions. This means the games public, particularly in Europe, receives a game, as well as a manual and support information they can understand. Despite this, the reason Arcanum has been delayed is to avoid competition with Diablo II: Lord of Destruction. Both titles are owned by French publishing giant, Havas Interactive.



C3 Processor

NEW CHIPSET FROM VIA

VIA has announced its C3 processor, which marks the next generation in CPU design. Clock speeds will start at 733MHz. The C3 features 192Kb of full-speed cache (128Kb level 1 & 64Kb level 2) and supports 133MHz Front Side Bus.

It is the smallest x86 processor on the market, with a die size of 52mm². Due to its size and "efficient architectural design" the new C3 processor delivers low power consumption and heat dissipation

properties. Comparisons show 25% lower power consumption than equivalent Celeron.

The obvious advantage of this low power, cooler processor is the ability to eliminate processor fans, thus lowering the price of units. The C3 will also be used in Silent PCs for the aesthetically minded. It is a Socket 370 processor, so can be used with any PIII motherboard.

VIA emphasise the versatility of the processor. Principle applications will include entry level systems and digital appliances such as TV converters for multimedia and internet. The low cost of the

processor is emphasised by promotional material stating the C3 "forms an integral part of the VIA Value Internet Architecture platform." Marketing pitches aside, this is a truly promising CPU. Check out the review on p98.



Indrema folds

LINUX CONSOLE CRASHES IN START-UP

California-based Indrema is out of business. The company set to take games development to the grassroots level, with its L-600 Linux-based console, could not secure financing and has run out of money.

The concept of using the open source platform Linux and no royalty fees, was aimed at attracting younger, smaller developers. The prohibitive costs of royalty fees and development kits for PlayStation 2, X-Box and the like, means there is considerable interest in such a console. The announcement comes as the company approached the release of the Indrema L-600 system in the second half of 2001. There was said to be around 30 games that would have been finished for release.

Number one with a bullet.



Mod Life

SPOONMAN'S ROUNDUP OF ALL THE LATEST MOD NEWS



INFILTRATION

For Unreal Tournament

Developer Sentry Studios

URL www.planetunreal.com/infiltration

Release 2.85

Infiltration is a mod that has gained increasing popularity over the last few months, and with good reason. Infiltration is very Counter-Strike, but obviously for Unreal Tournament. It's more than just a CS clone though, featuring many new game types, an excellent array of weapons and some brilliant levels. Although it's up to version 2.85 still quite a few of the expected features are not implemented. Still, it shows how excellent this Mod will be when completed, and I wouldn't hesitate to download it.



SABANETA 2050

For Half-Life

Developer A large group of Venezuelans (and Australians)

URL www.planethalflife.com/sabaneta

Release 0.71

Sabaneta 2050 is set in the year, funnily enough, 2050, and is basically comprised of a teamplay mod for Half-Life. Unlike the more popular teamplay mods (aka CS) Sabaneta is set in the future thus allowing a little more scope for originality. The scenario of cops vs robbers is all well and good. Notably, the main difference is experience points, and levels. Once you advance to higher levels you get more points. The features go on, but you'll have to download and see for yourself.



KILL THE KING

For Quake 3 Arena

Developer FAT MODS

URL www.planetquake.com/fatmods

Release 1.27

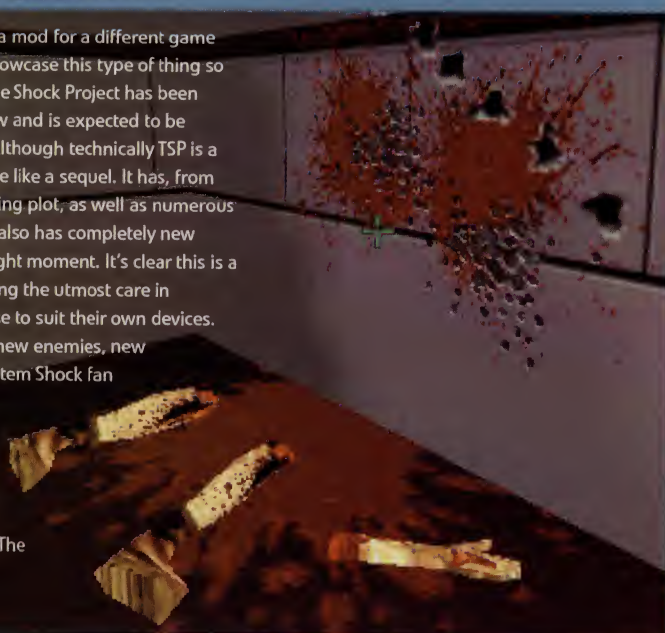
If you've always wanted to pump lead into Elvis then this one is for you. The idea is: a crown spawns in the map some place, the first person to find it becomes king. The idea is for them to kill everyone and everyone to kill them. Players don't get any frags from killing each other, just the king. This will, most assuredly, be a LAN party special.

THE SHOCK PROJECT

For System Shock 2 **Developer** Pangean Software

URL www.pangeansoftware.com **Release** December

Once again, it's excellent to review a mod for a different game every now and again. We love to showcase this type of thing so let us know if you find any more. The Shock Project has been running for around five months now and is expected to be released in December of this year. Although technically TSP is a mod for System Shock 2, it's far more like a sequel. It has, from what we can gather, a very interesting plot, as well as numerous sub-plots to keep you interested. It also has completely new music to creep you out just at the right moment. It's clear this is a mammoth task and Pangean is taking the utmost care in recreating the System Shock universe to suit their own devices. Everything is new - new weapons, new enemies, new everything. Obviously if you're a System Shock fan you'd be positively salivating at the moment. If you're not, you should be. The Shock Project is shaping up to be one of the finest mods ever. In fact, the word mod doesn't do it justice. We will take another look at The Shock Project closer to its release.



SPOONMAN'S LAN DIARY

A whole year of LANing has past, and people are STILL playing Counter-strike, what are they thinking?

RCGA

Location Brisbane QLD

Dates 15/6/01 (every couple of weeks)

Players 100

Price \$8 (\$2 members)

URL www.rcga.net

A basic one day LAN where everything goes as you'd expect. Bring your own PC, network card, food etc and friends. That's right, bring your friends and they'll get \$5 off membership (normally \$20). Food and drink is sold at the venue, so if you couldn't be bothered lugging the esky along make sure you bring your wallet. If you miss this one don't worry though, because they have a LAN every couple of weeks.

PULSE GAMING

Location Sydney NSW

Dates 16/6/01

Players 64

Price \$15

URL www.pulsegaming.com

Pulse is big on the funky features that make a LAN stand up above its competitors. They've got free drinks, excellent tournament prizes, lucky door prizes (for the complete lamers like myself, shut up David...) and Internet access, so you can ICQ they guy over the other side of the room instead of getting off your bum and walking. How decadent, I love it.

SGL

Location Sydney NSW

Dates Monthly

Players 180

Price \$20

URL www.sgl.org.au

Okay, so SGL is one of the "big LANs" that everyone's heard of, but it still should get its fair share. SGL is \$20 for 15 hours of gaming which includes a BBQ lunch and Dinner. One of the best things about SGL is its slightly off-the-wall tournament concepts, such as the 2001 Frag Challenge amongst others. It's big, it's short, it's SGL. Is SGL, is good.

For submissions, email spoonman@next.com.au

Win!

THE MYST 3 COLLECTORS EDITION

If you were one of the few people who missed (no pun intended) out on experiencing the original Myst phenomenon, then you should check out *Myst 3: Exile* to make up for it. We've reviewed it on p68 this issue, but if you're too lazy to buy it then why not try to win yourself a copy.

Ubisoft has given us FIVE copies of the *Myst 3 Collectors Edition* - a rare, limited edition package featuring the full game, soundtrack CD, Prima's official strategy guide, Pewter Squee toy, and the *Making of Exile* video CD. To win, simply answer this question on the back of an envelope and send your entry to the address below.

Q: *Myst 3* is developed by Presto Studios. Name another game that Presto has been responsible for...

Myst 3 Comp @ PC PowerPlay,
78 Renwick St, Redfern 2016.



Winners!

MICROSOFT GAME OF THE MONTH #60
D. Ficarra of Chatswood, NSW.

PC
CD
ROM



Ride into town and raise hell in the rowdiest Wild West game ever. It's 25 levels of spur janglin' mayhem as you gather a posse on the trail of the murderous El Diablo. Only the smartest will survive.

DESPERADOS
Wanted Dead or Alive



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DVDA

WITH JAMES COTTEE

SNATCH

Columbia Tristar, MA 15+

From the director of *Lock, Stock & Two Smoking Barrels*, this is a humorous and ultra-violent look into the seedy English underworld. Edgy editing and great performances make this film, and Brad Pitt even pulls his own weight as a degenerate gypsy. A tasty two disc package, and you can even watch the feature with deleted scenes seamlessly re-integrated, a logical feature that hasn't been done before.

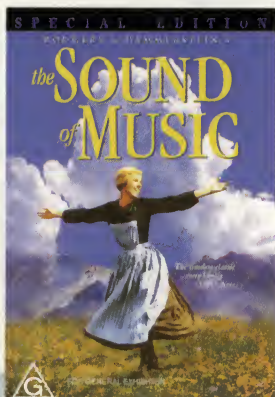


SCORE 0000

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

Columbia Tristar, G

Damn, Julie Andrews is hot. Set against the backdrop of pre-war Austria, this movie is an adaptation of a Rogers and Hammerstein musical that ripped off another movie that loosely followed the life story of the Von Trapp family. Until their spunky new governess turned up, the lonely Von Trapp suppressed the singing impulses of his seven adorable children. Can a barrage of musical numbers warm his heart? Two disc set, arse loads of features.



SCORE 0000

THE BLUES BROTHERS

Columbia Tristar, M

Whilst one of them is dead and the other is a corpulent joke, the Blues Brothers live on in the part of our brains we reserve for the purest cult movie content. This is a digitally remastered version of the most complete print still in existence, and carries a decent spread of features, including a big-arse doco. Throw that ratty old tape away and bask in full 5.1 Blues indulgence. Just try not to think about the sequel.



SCORE 0000

ROUGHNECKS (STARSHIP CHRONICLES)

The Pluto Campaign, Columbia Tristar, PG

If you have been missing this series on cable, then you've been missing out. Combining the best bits of the film (sex appeal) and the book (powered armour) with the very latest in CG animation, this is the most kick-arse children's television to come out of the 20th century. This has the first five episodes, where Rico, Dizzy and the rest of the Roughnecks investigate the Bug menace on Pluto. Hopefully the first in a series.



SCORE 0000

BOND FLICKS

IN WHICH PIERCE
BROSNAN COMES OUT ON
TOP AGAIN

TOMORROW NEVER DIES

20th Century Fox, M

The recent spyplane crisis reminded us all that WWII will probably start in the South China Sea, making this Bond flick look unnervingly prophetic. Eliot Carver, mutation of Rupert Murdoch and Bill Gates, not only wants to take over the world, but he's killed one of Jimbo's innumerable ex-girlfriends! Sexy action ensues.

000



GOLDENEYE

20th Century Fox, PG

Why the Russians would name a killer satellite after Ian Fleming's house is anyone's guess. They tried to turn Bond into a big softie in Pierce's first take on the definitive male chauvinist spy, and as such this one works best as a comedy. Actually, they all do. But the IT antics are especially chucklesome.

000



LICENCE TO KILL

20th Century Fox, M

I've suspected for years that all bad guys drink petrol, which would explain why they tend to explode. Now a drug lord is not only mixing drugs with petrol, he's dropped Bond's best friend in a shark tank! This movie killed off the Bond franchise for six years, but I liked it.

000



CRAPPY FLICKS...

CHARLIE'S ANGELS

Columbia Tristar, M

A sexy television show of yesteryear is brought to the big screen by Bill Murray, Cameron Diaz, Drew Barrymore and few other skanks. Plenty of stimulus and extras, just no substance whatsoever.

000



BOOTMEN

20th Century Fox, M

A profoundly self-indulgent semi-autobiographical telling of the origins of the "Stomp" tap dance sensation. On the big plus side, Sophie Lee is in it. Can you believe that she ended up marrying that fat guy?

00



AUTUMN IN NEW YORK

Roadshow, M

Winona Ryder's making a big deal these days about how she no longer wants to play helpless bug-eyed waifs, but she obviously hasn't got it out of her system yet. Tragedy, romance, etc.

00



THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS

20th Century Fox, PG

Two things bother me about this film: That the actor that played the villain came back two movies later as Bond's new CIA contact, and the rather romantic depiction of the Islamic "freedom fighters" infesting Afghanistan. Other than that it's about average, and like most Bond flicks, dated horribly.

000





Baldur's Gate™ II

Throne of Bhaal™



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UNRAVEL THE MYSTERIES OF THE WATCHER'S KEEP, A NEW DUNGEON TO EXPLORE ANY TIME BEFORE OR AFTER YOU COMPLETE YOUR EPIC QUEST.

CAST NEW HIGH LEVEL SPELLS AS YOUR CHARACTERS CLIMB AS HIGH AS THE 40TH LEVEL AND GAIN POWERFUL NEW ABILITIES.

ENCOUNTER FIERCE NEW MONSTERS AND VILLAINS DURING YOUR SEARCH FOR NEVER BEFORE SEEN POWERFUL ITEMS. ALSO PLAY A NEW CHARACTER KIT, THE WILD MAGE.



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COMPLETE THE EPIC SAGA AND FULFIL YOUR DESTINY.
CONTINUE YOUR QUEST WINTER 2001.

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons



Developed By:
BiOWARE
CORP



BALDUR'S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN REQUIRED

ANTICIPATED RATING:
MIS+ MEDIUM LEVEL ANIMATED VIOLENCE

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Coming soon

JUNE 2001

Anachronox Ozisoft
Baldur's Gate 2 Throne of Bhaal Interplay
Conflict Zone Ubisoft
Emperor Battle for Dune Electronic Arts
Evil Twin Ubisoft
Fly II Jack of all Games
Gangsters 2 Ozisoft
I-War 2 Edge of Chaos Ozisoft
Leadfoot Jack of all Games
Legends of Might & Magic Jack of all Games
MechCommander 2 Microsoft
Merchant Prince 2 Jack of all Games
Rune Halls of Valhalla Jack of all Games

JULY 2001

Alone in the Dark Ozisoft
Diablo II Lord of Destruction Jack of all Games
Dungeon Siege Microsoft
Max Payne Jack of all Games
Motor City Online Electronic Arts
Neverwinter Nights Interplay

AUGUST 2001

Duke Nukem Forever Jack of all Games
Empire Earth Jack of all Games
Mafia Jack of all Games
Red Faction THQ
Super Bombad Racing Electronic Arts
Throne of Darkness Jack of all Games

AUGUST 2001

C&C Renegade Electronic Arts
Myth 3 Jack of all Games
Pool of Radiance Ozisoft
Project Eden Ozisoft
Stronghold Jack of all Games



Australia's most wanted

If our list is a forecast of the nation's gaming habits then we're heading for sunny days of strategy, cloudy patches of RPG and gale force natural disasters of shooters. The list features our usual contenders except for Emperor, which strides back into the list as Warcraft 3 drops out. Speaking of fantasy titles, interest in the RPG world seems to be waxing, following our giant preview last month. Neverwinter Nights and Pool of Radiance hold strong in the middle of the list, the David to the very Goliaths of today's gaming. The universal appeal of the FPS accounts for almost half of the titles in Top 10. Red Faction (shaping up as the next Half-Life) just beat off Return to Castle Wolfenstein (shaping up to be the next Wolfenstein 3D) for the top spot - any

Neverwinter Nights

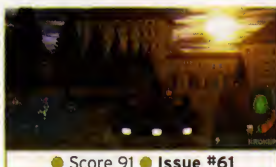


thoughts? The little battler Halo remains in the list, a testament to the memory of Hugh. This month's lucky winner is **i. Brown of Fortitude Valley, Qld**. A copy of World Sports Cars is yours! Send your Top Five most wanted games to: wanted@pcpowerplay.com.au

1	RED FACTION	◀
2	Return to Castle Wolfenstein	◀
3	Commandos 2	◀
4	Neverwinter Nights	◀
5	Pool of Radiance	◀
6	I-War 2	◀
7	Doom 3	◀
8	Alone in the Dark 4	◀
9	Halo	◀
10	Emperor: Battle of Dune	◀

Hall of fame

DO YOU OWN THESE MODERN MASTERPIECES?
PCPP GOLD IS YOUR GUARANTEE!

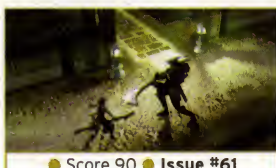


● Score 91 ● Issue #61

Hostile Waters

Interplay

Hostile Waters is a unique challenge to your mind and skills. Hardcore strategy gamers, you need this game. You won't see a smarter shooter for a long time.

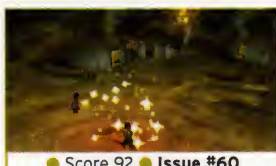


● Score 90 ● Issue #61

Summoner

THQ

It's dark, it's moody, it's bright, it's silly - the only thing it isn't is boring. An RPG experience like no other, with great battles, strong AI and *atmosphere*.



● Score 92 ● Issue #60

Black & White

Electronic Arts

Much hyped God & his pet sim offers great power with a good dash of personality. Anthony trounced Black & White and it still got gold - now that's pedigree.



● Score 93 ● Issue #60

NASCAR Racing 4

Jack of All Games

American style racing with all the stops out, this is NASCAR with an unprecedented level of detail. The new industry standard.



● Score 92 ● Issue #60

Sudden Strike

QV Software

Realtime strategy with three nations, not three races. Big missions, big forces and big interface make up a thrilling wartime escapade, what.

Our most wanted



DAVID Arx

I want my Underworld 3



ANTHONY Arcanum

I still don't like 2D RPGs



JOHN Torn

I'm suffering Torment withdrawal



DANIEL Startopia

I am a two-headed alien, too

Games Chart

THE BEST SELLERS THIS MONTH

MOVE ALONG
NOTHING TO SEE HERE

YES, IT'S STILL THE SIMS

Harvey Norman

PC PowerPlay

SAVE 15% OFF ANY TOP 20 GAME!

Harvey Norman franchisees would like to offer readers of PC PowerPlay an exclusive discount offer on the titles appearing on the Official Australian PC Games Chart. Simply complete the coupon and take it into any Harvey Norman franchise store to claim your discount.

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HP9

Black & White

IT WAS THE MOST ANTICIPATED GAME OF THE YEAR, BUT DID BLACK & WHITE LIVE UP TO THE HYPE? OUR FIRST ROUNDTABLE DISSECTS LIONHEAD'S DEBUT

Moderator : David Wildgoose

Panel : Anthony Fordham, Edward Fox, James Cottee, John Dewhurst



DW: Let's begin with your reactions to playing the game for the first time.

Edward Fox: I loved it at first. I thought I was excellent, but that changed after a while. It just got too repetitive, all the picking up trees and taking them to the storehouse...

DW: But you can train your creature to do that for you

EF: It can only pick up, like, 100 wood at a time...

John Dewhurst: I hated how I couldn't skip the obtrusive tutorial...

EF: And when you restart you have to sit through it all over again.

James Cottee: The devil had floppy tits. It was quite alarming.

Anthony Fordham: I was disappointed that I couldn't choose to not save the child. And I felt a bit lost at the start, the way it puts you straight into the game. I missed all the usual start menus where you can set the video mode or the controls.

EF: They did that to make it feel like

turns out that it's quite good.

JD: Yeah, I didn't realise you could just use the mouse...

EF: I still use a combination of mouse and keyboard.

JD: I appreciated the more integrated style, the way you slapped and tickled your creature and didn't worry about buttons and icons.

AF: The gesture system was useless. Why draw an R shape on the ground when you can just press R on the keyboard?

DW: It would have been better if the gesture had affected the way you cast the spell rather than merely selecting which one to cast.

JC: Do you think I could just say the word 'fruity' here?

DW: Speaking of fruit, is it hard to be evil? Or is that missing the point?

EF: It's very easy to be evil. My hand was all gnarly and black very quickly... And I'd only thrown a few kids off a cliff.

means to the same end. It's too simplistic. There should have been different types of belief - belief based on love and belief based on fear, perhaps.

Creature features

DW: Which creature did everyone choose?

JD: Monkey! He was sooo cute... *grrnn grrnn skree!*

AF: The cow at first, but he just wasn't evil enough...

DW: The monkey irritated me, so I went with the cow.

JC: I didn't get that far.

AF: What's the point of the creature?

JD: They're cute and funny!

EF: If there was no creature, it'd be the same game but without the story.

JD: It's interesting to have this thing in the world who reflects you...

DW: And it's half the fun just playing with and watching your creature do creature stuff.

AF: I would have enjoyed it better if the creature was more integrated into the game, if it had a purpose.

JC: Anthony just wants the whole game to be shit.

DW: He can only see things in black and white, nothing in between...

AF: I haven't found anything in there that Molyneux didn't tell me in the interview.

DW: So it was a good interview then. Congratulations.

JD: Would it have been a better game if you knew any less about it?

AF: Well, I was expecting a story-based game, not a mechanics-based game. More Deus Ex than Pac-man

EF: I agree. The story is just crap.

AF: I can't believe Molyneux said it took him a year to write the story. And that he consulted real live Hollywood scriptwriters...

DW: Sure, the story is one of the least interesting parts of the game, but most of those 'mechanics' you're criticising are really fascinating. There's a lot of cool stuff happening in the

world that you won't notice if you're not paying attention.

Love and hate

DW: I can't be the only person here who likes Black & White. I think it's the best game released this year.

JD: I like the monkey!

AF: I don't think I like it.

EF: I was thinking of taking it back. It fascinated me at first, but it was downhill after the hundredth tree I pulled out of the hundredth hill.

JC: I like the cow.

DW: It feels like no other game. It borrows from lots of other games, but still feels unique.

AF: The silver scrolls are good, particularly ones like the Towers of Hanoi. And I like the creature, even though I hate it.

JC: We should do a Roundtable with just Anthony, so he can just argue with himself.

EF: It's not a game you could replay. Once you've completed the game, it'd be too frustrating to do it all again. All those trees to pick up...

AF: Perversely enough, I think there's lots of replayability. All the quests, all the secret bits you've missed. Apparently there are a lot of easter eggs, like a phone booth...

JD: Like no other game, it gives you real choice about how to play it. I spent hours and hours just messing 'round with my monkey...

JC: And then you got Black & White.

The gesture system was useless. Why draw an R shape on the ground when you can just press R on the keyboard?

you're not playing a computer game, so you're constantly immersed in the world.

AF: That's fair enough, but there's no consistency to it. The interface isn't invisible, there are still icons onscreen. There's a shortcut to go to the menu and save so you don't have to go to the temple. They should have either taken out all these things or kept them all in.

Interface issues

DW: The interface was different though, and plenty of people struggled with it. What did you think of it?

EF: What interface?

DW: Exactly. It's so powerful, yet incredibly simple at the same time.

AF: At first it pissed me off. But then the "advanced players" like David and Eliot (Fish, Editor of Hyper) told me how to use it properly and in the end it

AF: I never meant to say it was hard to be evil. I meant there is a bias toward doing good deeds. Every time you're asked to do something, it's good. I wanted scrolls where you're asked to smash the neighbour's house. Instead, when you want to be evil, you've got to act contrary to what people ask. And when you do, there are no repercussions to being evil.

DW: But you're God - you create the rules! You can do anything!

AF: Okay, I guess I just don't agree with Lionhead's interpretation of good and evil. There's no moral difference between good and evil in the game; they're just



HAVE YOUR SAY

Join the debate in the PCPP Forum. What do you think of Black & White? Do you disagree with Anthony? Or do you agree with David? Write in and let us know. We will publish the best responses in our new Forum page to follow each Roundtable discussion.

Send your articulation to: letters@pcppowerplay.com.au and put Roundtable in the subject.

Who Runs Your Neighbourhood?



EIDOS

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Gangsters 2



The Mob takes over your PC again.



INBOX

PLATINUM PC

The **LETTER OF THE MONTH** writer wins a game from Ozisoft's Platinum range of titles. Available in Platinum this month are Deathtrap Dungeon, Tomb Raider, Outcast, Imperium Galactica 2, TA: Kingdoms, Wheel of Time, and Le Mans 24 Hours.



Letters Topic: Sweeping generalisations are out this season...

Write to: PC PowerPlay Letters, 78 Renwick St, Redfern 2016 Email: letters@pcpowerplay.com.au



WITH PEPPER SPRAY?

I use your magazine as a means of passing time on the toilet. I think your articles are great, and I used to buy games depending on your magazine's game scores. But lo and behold! Nay do I still do this!

Deus Ex was the most boring game I have ever played yet you made it Game of 2000! The attention to detail was pathetic (c'mon, the terrorists are wearing gas-masks or something yet you can mess them up with pepper spray?). It offered nothing in the sense of either tactical skill or carnage. And the atmosphere - looks nice but that was it.

Another excellent example is Red Alert 2 - what a pile of crap! I don't want to hear the excuse of multiplayer - if it does get released as both (singleplayer & multiplayer), then make both sides of it good! Half-Life was fantastic, and look at what it has done to the multiplayer universe!

Games used to take some level of intelligence to play - either I'm a

genius or the level of peoples' intellect is getting really, really low. No wonder so many kids are dumb and go around shooting each other.

Luke Hobbs

To say that games in general are no longer intelligent because a particular well-reviewed game doesn't appeal to you personally is self-indulgent to say the least. Trust that PCPP's reviewers will be honest but don't expect them to read your mind.

GAMES DISTURBED HIM

Several letters I have read from gamers have left me quite disturbed. One wrote that he was disgusted with Project IGI and Hitman because of the lack of save options. If these games disturbed him or any other gamers, simply don't play them. These aren't the only games on sale. PC PowerPlay reviews games so that people know the features they contain. Instead of reading these reviews and buying a

different game, he then complains to PC PowerPlay.

This brings up the second part of my letter. A couple of other letters stated that they were annoyed at the way some reviews put down a game or made it out to be excellent. One said he would stop reading PC PowerPlay to find a better PC game mag (good luck) because a game he thinks was crap got a good review.

Another complained because a game he liked was said to be poor. He even insulted the reviewer over it. Instead of taking it out on the reviewers, just relax and play the game if you like it. Don't blame the reviewers for differences in opinion.

Jeremy Farrugia

POSITION TO ASSESS

Every time magazines rank games according to the opinions of its reviewers, you can guarantee disputes from readers. I have been a gamer for the last twelve months. In that time I have played about ten games. Three of

the games were released in 2000. If I was to vote on what was the best game in 2000 I would be voting for the best of the three games I played. That hardly qualifies me as an expert on the games released last year.

On the other hand, game reviewers have experience of many more games than the average gamer. Therefore they are in a better position to assess which games are worthy and which are just well marketed. That is why I take note of reviewer lists, but treat reader lists as curiosity pieces, published to placate readers who take satisfaction in trying to prove the bad review given to a game was not supported by other gamers.

Peter D'Castro

BYTE SIZE

Is there any chance whatsoever that there will be a System Shock 3?

PSI.KO

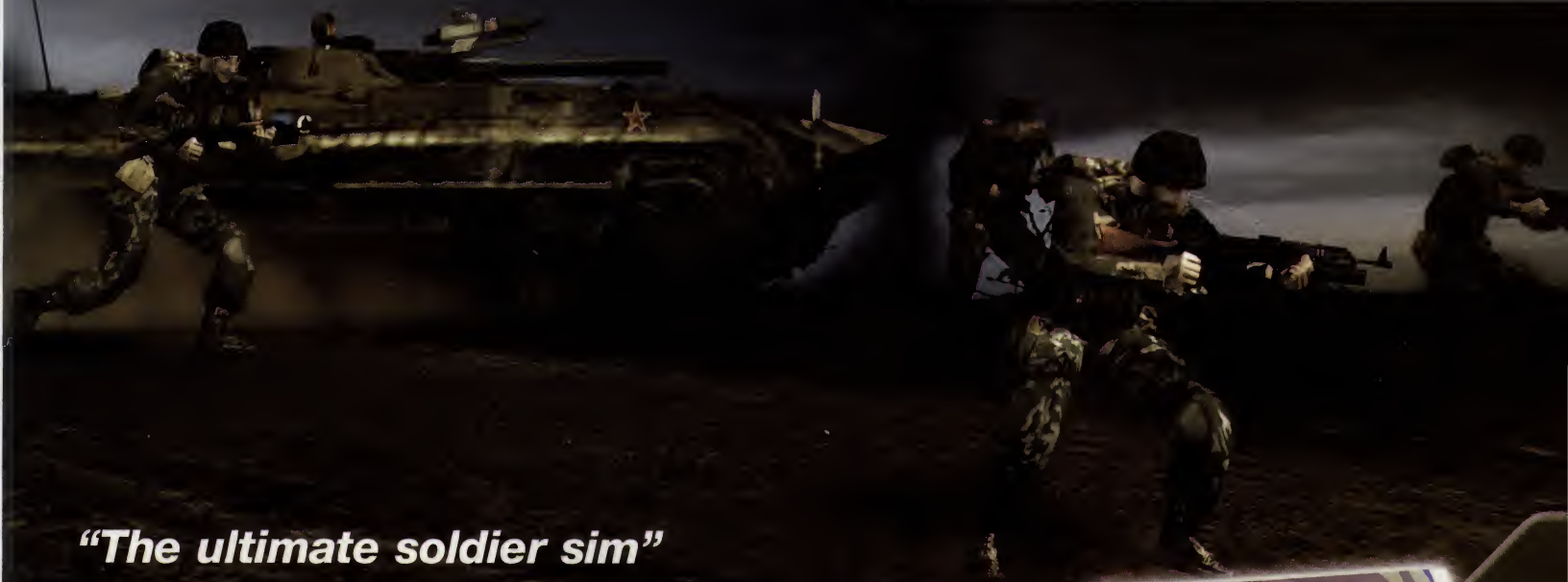
Probably not. Since those responsible are now mostly dispersed across the industry, it's unlikely that any further sequel will remain true to the original's spirit. A better bet is to check out the current projects from Irrational, Ion Storm and those ubiquitous ex-Looking Glass people.

A NEW DUKE

I always thought that game company employees were a bunch of losers but the 3D Realms bunch just take the cake. For four years they lead us to believe that they were making a new Duke Nukem game but they were just being dumb arses and not making it. They did this because thirdparty developers were using the Duke Nukem character for the console games so they thought they should say they're making a new Duke game for computer. Four years they stuffed around doing nothing. Is Max Payne going the same way because it has that 'When it's Done' date?

Luke Peart

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PC Gamer



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ETA: June 2001



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OZ13423 PETT 211098

PLEASE CONFIRM

Yesterday I went to my PC game retailer to purchase Duke Nukem Forever based on your review in PCPP. I was told that the release date of April 1st was an April Fools joke. Please confirm if I have just made a "dick" of myself.

Bob James

DEPRESSION SETS IN

April fools! Not funny. I mean there are some things you can joke about and there are things you shouldn't fool with. Do you think it's funny to get me all worked up and then, depression sets in. I've been reading your mag for years and take everything as gospel except a few reviews. Then you go and pull this stunt. I really wish it were true. People you're just cruel.

Justin Hall

Sorry about the joke, we couldn't resist. Don't fret, Duke himself will write an exclusive review of Max Payne next month.

SPOONY DOES GIVE

PCPP needs more reading material. My one complaint about PCPP is the articles and stories are just too darn good, so good in fact that once I start reading them I cannot stop reading, this means after two weeks I've finished the mag. I bet that's the worst complaint you've ever had in the history of your mag.

How about some extra gaming articles? Suggestions: lengthy and conclusive reviews of add-ons and bonus missions from the Internet. Spoony does give short descriptions but I like to know all the ins and outs. To me, half the reason I buy a game is because I know that the game will survive because of the add-ons made, games such as Red Alert, Quake, Need For Speed, Dirt Track Racing and Dungeon Keeper.

ROM

We'll see what we can do.

BYTE SIZE

After viewing the Halo movie from Gamestock 2001, I think you guys might want to consider changing your name to PC PowerPlay With Some Xbox Content. Seriously, I've never been a console fan, but Halo on the Xbox looks awesome.

MiHeadHurtz

Indeed it does. But why wait for Halo when you can play Tribes 2 on PC right now?

VIRTUALLY NON-EXISTENT

While the trend towards packaging new games in DVD cases may be good for publishers and retailers, it's going to be a big downer on printed manuals and reference cards. Due to the small size of the packaging the paperwork with the game will be virtually non-existent. Another saving for the publisher?

The trend lately is to put the manual on the CD-ROM. While this saves paper for the publisher, it means that the gamer has to either print it out and stick it in a folder or pause and leave the game so he can fire up another program and read the manual. Neither method appeals to someone who has just installed his latest game and is more interested in playing than printing or dropping out to read the manual.

BYTE SIZE

After reading the PCPP crew section of PCPP#60 all I have to say is, was James Cottea a porno star?

John Sanderson

Was? Is, more like.

When going on about advantages of the new DVD packaging please pause to remember the manuals that came with games like MechWarrior IV, Diablo II, Falcon 4, Klingon Academy, just to name a few. These types of manuals won't fit in the new boxes and may become an endangered species.

Stan Sale

To be honest, we would prefer games that don't need a manual. A cleverly designed learning curve is all that is required. Tutorials should illustrate the basics sufficiently to allow the player to discover the depth of the game himself. Manuals are overrated, aren't they?

AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE

Has anyone else noticed the amount of high budget, good quality games has decreased significantly over the past 3-7 months? I pull open my PC PowerPlay and all I see is: whoa golf that sounds like fun, what else is in here oh look pinball also quite exciting... or not.

We have yet to experience the game of all games, the one that will keep you glued to your seat for 3 days non-stop. Sure Half-Life and Deus Ex had their moment, and for Half-Life it was a very long and successful moment. It seems now that money and profit have taken

LETTER OF THE MONTH**ADDRESSED NEARLY FIVE**

I recently read PCPP#60 and watched the Doom3/GeForce3 preview included on the coverdisc. I must say that the graphics and lighting the card put to screen is amazing. But seeing the difference in not only the polygon count but the lighting effects used raised a serious question. The new features integrated in this card obviously are not available in any other card's architecture, so how will these games run on the cards released prior to the arrival of the GeForce3's special feature set?

The way these upcoming games have been written specifically for the card is reminiscent of the very first 3D accelerator cards developed. Originally game developers were writing games for specific cards. I can see that this issue is not as extreme as the one addressed nearly five years ago but it is along similar lines.

Obviously nVidia does not want to divide the market and discourage developers from coding for their new card. So what will the new games look like on cards like the GeForce2 and lower?

Nigel Stacey

You've highlighted one of the biggest challenges facing PC developers. With an evolving, unstable platform such as the PC, developers are forced to code to a huge range of possible components and their features. DirectX has certainly assisted in overcoming this challenge - and will continue to do so for the GeForce3 and beyond. To answer your question: on older hardware these games won't look as good, thus encouraging gamers to leap back on the upgrade merry-go-round. Such is the way of the PC.

over from quality. Companies are trying to gain as much as possible by doing as little as possible. Now with the help of 3D Realms and their new release Duke Nukem Forever let's start getting some high quality games out there. Otherwise I will get bored and I might go do something crazy like buy a PS2 or something.

Chris Gee

You're too harsh, Chris. What about Black & White, Hostile Waters, and Tribes 2 in the last two months? Or Emperor, Commandos 2, Operation Flashpoint, and Alone in the Dark to come? The new year period is always kinda slow, but the PC has some fantastic games looming. Of course it does pale in comparison to the oversupply of quality on PS2.

ADDING GAMEPLAY

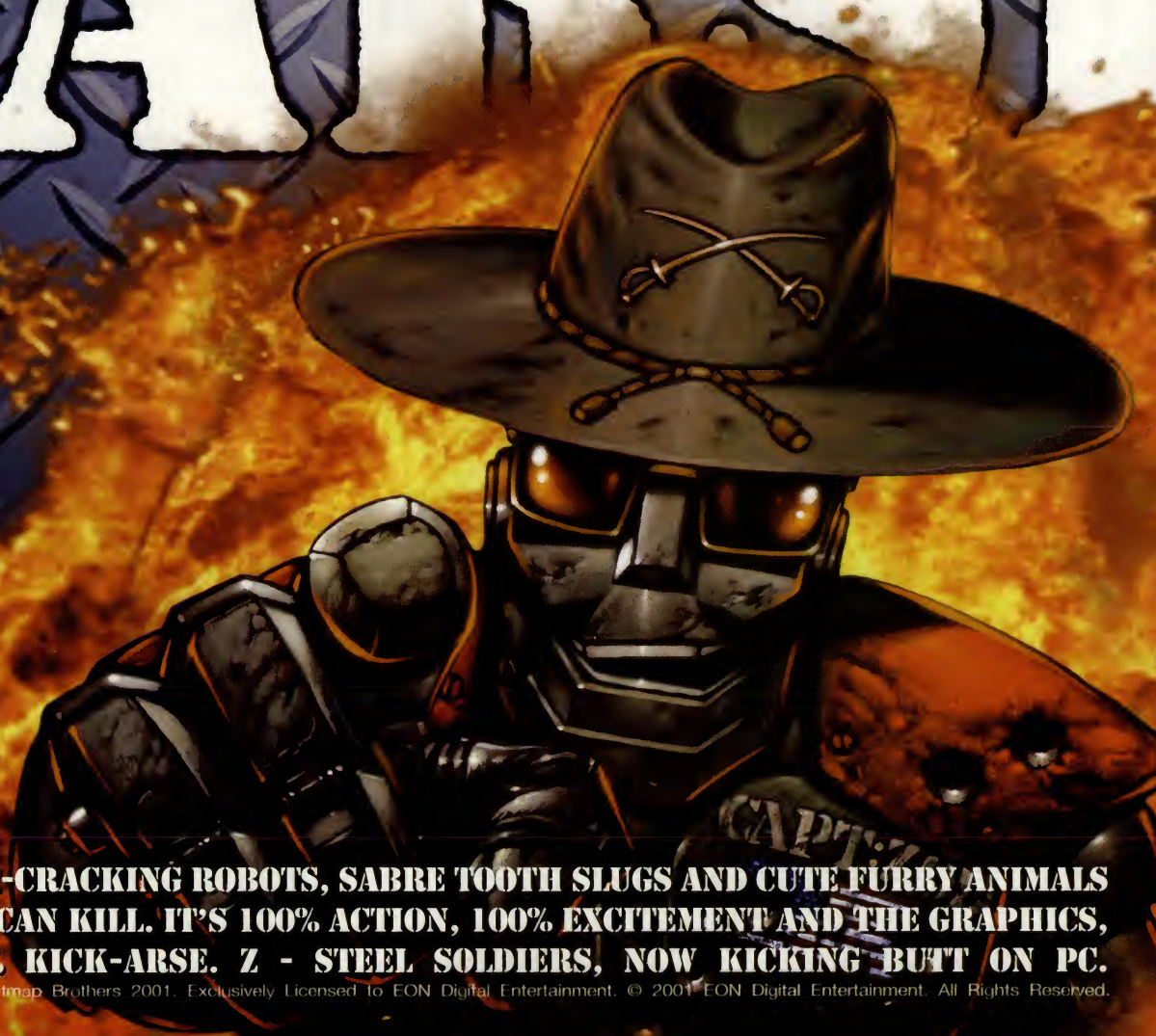
I have known people who kill Half-Life's security guards for ammo, and in #54 Ryan Schlegl was trying to "Kill everyone in UNATCO and survive". Nobody finds that deeply disturbing, yet when we are forced to do similar things in "gore" games we do. Some of us found Soldier of Fortune disturbing, including myself. I thought it relied too heavily on the gore element to sell itself. Ever tried playing SoF with all the blood turned off? It is amazingly boring; illustrating my point that it relied

heavily on gore to motivate the player. The morals it is representing are even more offensive, e.g. when you shoot a guy in the leg he jumps up and down screaming in pain so you let him go. He then stops, starts shooting you again so you are forced to kill him. If they took the time they spent adding in all that extra gore and spent it adding actual gameplay I may have liked it.

I will leave SoF alone now and get on with the letter. What does my original point say about our society's morals? I am sure killing innocent civilians in games is not coming from playing SoF, so where is it coming from? Our sense of fun, which is what games are about. We take SoF and Kingpin seriously because of the way they are presented. We do not take Quake3 seriously because of the way it is presented. This whole debate is not about violence at all; it is about games and their morals. What do you find more powerful to your sense of morals: a Half-Life scientist laying in a corner speaks his last words to you then chokes to death in his own blood, or blowing up your mate with a rocket launcher in Q3A? While Q3A wins hands down with violence, Half-Life wins with moral effect. Half-Life is a serious game and Quake3 is not. That is why we find games disturbing, not because of violence, but of their morals.

Barry van Laatum

WISE ARSE HARD ARSE KICK ARSE



**WISE-CRACKING ROBOTS, SABRE TOOTH SLUGS AND CUTE FURRY ANIMALS
YOU CAN KILL. IT'S 100% ACTION, 100% EXCITEMENT AND THE GRAPHICS,
100% KICK-ARSE. Z - STEEL SOLDIERS, NOW KICKING BUTT ON PC.**

© The Bitmap Brothers 2001. Exclusively Licensed to EON Digital Entertainment. © 2001 EON Digital Entertainment. All Rights Reserved.

The in-game interface is similar to the one found in *The Sims*. One difference is this menu bar when in city view mode. It allows the player to monitor various stats and keep track of events in the gameworld.

This particular Sims-ville looks a bit bare right now - the game is still in development, after all. Expect it to begin resembling suburban sprawl within mere days of its release though.



DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Maxis

PUBLISHER

Electronic Arts

AVAILABLE

TBA

URL

www.maxis.com

The Sims Online

THE SIMS WAS ALL ABOUT BUILDING A VIRTUAL COMMUNITY, NOT JUST IN THE GAME ITSELF BUT IN THE FANSITES SPAWNED ONLINE. THE SIMS ONLINE IS TAKING THE NEXT LOGICAL STEP, COMBINING THE TWO ASPECTS INTO ONE UNIFIED FORUM FOR SIMS PLAYERS WORLDWIDE. SIM-TASTIC! SAYS **DAVID WILDGOOSE**

By any criteria, *The Sims* has proved to be a phenomenon without precedence on the PC. Since its release over a year ago, *The Sims* has been the only constant in the upper echelon of weekly PC games sales charts across the world. Indeed, for most of that time it's been at number one. And at the time of writing, *The Sims* and its two expansion packs - *Livin' Large* and *House Party* - still occupy three of the top five places in both Australia and the United States. It's an utterly extraordinary story of success.

Aside from the enviable strength of the *Sims* franchise and a mighty marketing push from publisher Electronic Arts, the game's success can be attributed to several factors. The concept was a breath of fresh air amid countless firstperson shooters and realtime

strategy titles; here was a game based around the novel idea of *not killing anyone*. Remarkable! It also presented an open-ended challenge: progressing through the career paths provided a solid structure to the design but ultimately it was left to the player to devise his or her own overall objectives. For these reasons it appealed to the jaded, hardcore gamer.

Yet the real reason for the success of *The Sims* is that it stepped beyond that core gaming market; here was a game based around the novel idea of everyday existence (as long as you live in a western capitalist society, that is). By utilising a familiar setting, *The Sims* reached out to everyone. Its appeal was universal, spanning generation and gender divides with ease - your kid brother liked it, your grandmother probably bought it. Soon it seemed as if the whole world was



playing *The Sims*.

What better step to take next than to bring all those players together? Surely the perfect game would be one where everyone playing *The Sims* is playing *The Sims* together? And so, with as much inevitability as me finding the appropriate simile to use here, *The Sims Online* was born.



Replacing the inane gibberish of the original Sims, the online version allows players to type their speech in realtime. Hopefully the more mainstream appeal of The Sims will result in less 1337 speak than is usually found on web-based chat. Fingers crossed anyway.

To accommodate the emphasis on character interaction, Maxis has increased the available options in each Sim's thought bubble. Here you can choose your Sim's disposition. Or get them to subscribe to Hyper, if you prefer.

Simply the best?

Confession time: when PCPP first heard Maxis was working on an online, massively multiplayer version of The Sims, we were highly sceptical. How could it possibly work? How many Sims would the player control? Would it all happen in a persistent state world? How will the society be organised and structured? Will you still have to tell your Sim to use the toilet?

With all these thoughts circling my head, I approached Maxis to set the record straight. The team were all in pre-E3 crunch mode however, so finding someone to interview was fraught with difficulty.

Telling a joke to **Will Wright** (Designer of The Sims) failed to elicit a response - he wasn't impressed and instead walked off to read a book about mathematics. Flirting with **Christine McGavran** (Producer of the



upcoming Simsville) similarly did not achieve the desired effect (*Hal - Deputy Ed*) she got angry and stormed out of the house.

The problem was the options are too limited; these Sim people don't react like *real* people. My jokes *are* funny; my pick-up lines *always* work. What I needed was an interface that allowed me to express exactly what I wanted to say, and to talk to someone in realtime. What I needed was the kind of interface to be found in The Sims Online.

Finally, **Patrick Buechner**, Director of Marketing at Maxis, approached and a speech bubble appeared above his head. The bubble began to slowly fill with words until it contained an entire sentence: "David, I believe you have some questions you'd like to ask me?"

I was overjoyed. Soon we bonded over a mutual love of the Romance channel broadcasting on the TV in the living room, and Buechner agreed to reveal a few

tantalising details about Maxis' new game. Here's an edited transcript of our conversation:

How will the society be organised and structured? Will you still have to tell your Sim to use the toilet?

PCPP: Is The Sims Online a persistent state world? How will it be set up in terms of servers and number of players?

Patrick Buechner: The Sims Online is a persistent world. There will be multiple servers which we refer to as cities. Each city will hold thousands of homes, business and players. Each city will have its own unique geography. The geography is completely fictional.





In The Sims Online, each player is granted a plot of land to do with as they please. You can build a house as you would in The Sims or you can start up your own business, such as the café shown here.



PCPP: The screenshots seem to show a large land mass dotted with several neighborhoods. How do these neighborhood compare in size to the one in The Sims?

PB: Each server/city can hold several thousand homes, businesses, and players and will be roughly equal to 100,000 acres or 140 square miles.

PCPP: What happens to your Sim when you are not logged on to Sims Online?

PB: When you are not logged on, your Sim is removed from the world. Your lot (your own piece of land in The Sims Online) will not be accessible to other players unless you have roommates who are occupying the lot.

you have your own piece of land to do with as you please: create a house, coffee bar, dance club or museum

PCPP: How many Sims will the player be able to control?

PB: The player will be able to control one

Sim at a time. However each account allows three characters to be saved. So you're not stuck with just one character.

PCPP: Did you consider allowing multiple Sims to be controlled at once?

PB: Much of the game revolves around social interaction and cooperation between Sims, so controlling multiple Sims would have made this extremely difficult.

PCPP: Will you be able to import Sims from The Sims?

PB: You will not be able to import your Sims from the singleplayer game. This would allow some players to start with a huge advantage in skills and cash.

PCPP: Okay, so to what extent will the two games interact?

PB: You can import their skins and recreate them in The Sims Online. There will be hundreds of character styles to choose from. Also the thousands of fan created characters, floors, and wallpapers on the web will be importable into the game.

PCPP: Describe some of the new ways to interact with other Sims. One would

assume an online game would need far greater variety in this regard.

PB: There will be text chat and a huge variety of puppeteering controls for your Sim. There are also a number of objects being created for the game to allow social interaction, including objects designed specifically for Sims to work together to earn money.

PCPP: How will the game mechanics differ (or remain similar to) The Sims? What challenges have you faced transferring the singleplayer mechanics into multiplayer?

PB: The game engine and controls remain very similar, but we've created a completely new game around interaction between Sims. Players control one Sim at a time. There is a huge

assortment of commands to control the actions and behaviours of your Sim. We've added chat so players can talk with each other. In The Sims Online you have your own piece of land to do with as you please: create a house, coffee bar, dance club, museum or



In a nice touch, even though the main view depicts each house as a minuscule dot on the landscape, this window still lets the player keep an eye on his or her Sim. But perhaps these two would appreciate a little bit more privacy right now...



This aerial view with bonus extreme zoom perfectly illustrates the scope of The Sims Online. This city will hold thousands of players and their blocks of land. It's also just one of the many servers Maxis anticipates to have up and running when the game's finished.

whatever you can imagine; explore the neighborhoods around you and meet scores of Sims along the way; and build a network of friends to enhance your power, wealth, reputation and social standing.



PCPP: Will there be any social or political structures such as laws or associations in the world? How complex will the game be in this regard?

PB: Much of this will be created by the players themselves, but we will provide a number of ways for players to track their status in the world. You can click on any character in the game to bring up their rap sheet. This informational page contains all kinds of juicy tidbits about a Sim, like their rankings, Skills, interests and even how compatible the Sim is with yours. We also visually represent the social network so players can instantly see who the friends and enemies of any particular Sim really truly are.

PCPP: How much of an emphasis will be placed on economic concerns, such as getting a job or running a business? How have you incorporated the careers aspect of The Sims?

PB: There is a definite economic component to the game. Each player receives an initial sum of money and a small stipend (think welfare). Players will receive money in a variety of ways including working together with job objects, bringing large numbers of Sims to your lot or charging people to use certain objects on your lot.

Living in SIM

By now it was a little after midnight, my energy bar was running low and the trash still had to be taken out. Besides, one of the Roomies had just turned up and my guest was getting distracted. It was time to bid them farewell and get some sleep.

Of course, there are still many questions that need to be answered. With players logged on from timezones all over the world, how will the day/night cycle



function? Will you be able to rob other players? Can you uproot your belongings and move to a different neighbourhood or city? What has Maxis prepared to prevent The Sims Online from being nothing more than a sophisticated chat program?

In the coming months we'll take greater advantage of this new realtime chat option to further interrogate Maxis. They're real people now, after all.



BATTLE REALMS


DEVELOPER

Liquid Entertainment

AVAILABLE

4th Qtr

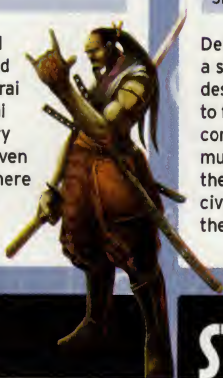
PUBLISHER

Crave

URL

www.battlerealms.com

It seems Greater Asia themed RTSs are all the rage, and Liquid is first onto the bandwagon with Battle Realms. With the kind of philosophical attitude to war that only a Zen Master Samurai can bring, Battle Realms places its focus on the fundamental interconnectedness of all things, with every soldier and every horse, every rice plant and every drop of water intricately woven into a delicate dance of balance and counterbalance. Also, there will be a lot of blood and gore as hundreds of highly trained troops hack each other to bits in a beautiful 3D world.



CONFLICT ZONE


DEVELOPER

MASA

AVAILABLE

3rd Qtr

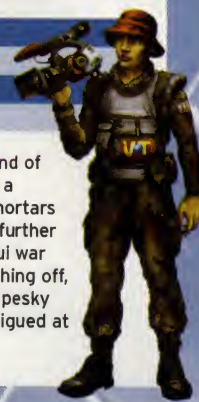
PUBLISHER

Ubisoft

URL

www.ubisoft.com

Delightfully French, this 3D RTS sees the player in command of a special UN taskforce assigned to peacekeeping duties in a destabilised Europe. With control of everything from field mortars to first aid choppers, the commander's sense of worry will be further compounded by the interference of the media. A successful war must be a popular war, and if the folks at home start switching off, then the operation is over. With a living game world full of pesky civilians and a devious enemy AI, Conflict Zone has us intrigued at the very least. After all, as the French say: "Ouil!"



SIGMA


DEVELOPER

Relic

AVAILABLE

TBA

PUBLISHER

Microsoft

URL

www.relic.com

The crew who brought us Homeworld, and breathed new life into RTS, are set to do it again. It sounds futuristic - combining animals to create new and ferocious breeds - but in fact the game is set in the 1930s on a mysterious chain of islands in the South Pacific. The ability to design new units by combining numerous parts is not a new idea, but with Homeworld under its belt, Relic has the track record to be the first developer to really make a success of this intriguing idea.



STEEL SOLDIERS


DEVELOPER

Bitmap Brothers

AVAILABLE

2nd Qtr

PUBLISHER

EON

URL

www.bitmap-brothers.co.uk

The original Z seemed like a good idea at the time, but when it came to actually playing the game, media and consumers alike were left with a profound sense of... not much really. The venerable Bitmap Brothers hope to address the shortcomings of Z with the sequel, and have included a very impressive 3D engine and the chunkiest tanks you ever saw. Like the first game, Steel Soldiers will use a resource system based on the control of specific territorial zones, and will feature those wisecracking robots we so loved in the original.

EMPIRE EARTH



DEVELOPER

Stainless Steel

AVAILABLE

August

PUBLISHER

Sierra

URL

www.empireearth.com

Does Age of Empires cramp your style? Do you need a bigger canvas on which to paint? Empire Earth offers a staggering 500,000 year slice of the human story, everything from sitting in a cave going 'ugh' to sitting in high orbit scoffing a McOz without beetroot and going 'ugh'. Split into twelve epochs, each representing a key moment in human development, the game will feature thousands of units, every major technological advance known to man, and a spectacular 3D engine, which all point to the possibility that Empire Earth could indeed become Civ for the Naughties.

WARRIOR KINGS



DEVELOPER

Black Cactus

AVAILABLE

October 2001

PUBLISHER

Sierra

URL

www.blackcactus.com

Another debut title that looks ready to hit the ground running, Warrior Kings is a 3D fantasy RTS in which huge armies clash in a quest for domination.

Careful design has Black Cactus promising an intuitive user interface that will suit newbies and 'leet gamorz' alike. One stand-out element is the gradual development of an alignment during play. Rather than choosing a side, all players in multiplayer games start out equal and by dint of their choices evolve into various factions offered in the game, whether they be Zombie King or Noble Knight.



STATE OF PLAY

REALTIME STRATEGY

Like the firstperson shooter, the origins of realtime strategy on the PC are easy to pinpoint. The first mainstream RTS on PC was a very clever design decision. By setting the game on the planet-wide desert of Arrakis, Westwood Studios only had to develop one environment tileset and were able to create something quite special with the limited technology of the early 90s.



Now of course we've seen a thousand and one iterations of the classic Dune 2 formula, from the sublime Starcraft to the execrable Mission Humanity. The only huge development in RTS in the past five years has been the tentative emergence of the 3D engine. Which is perhaps why all the RTS games to which we currently look forward use 3D engines, although in various different ways.

The biggest question that seems to be facing developers today is whether or not to give the player total control over movement of the camera. While initial 3D offerings such as Ground Control and Earth 2150 were excellent games, a lack of popular success suggests having to manage a camera as well as a complex military operation is simply too bothersome for many players.

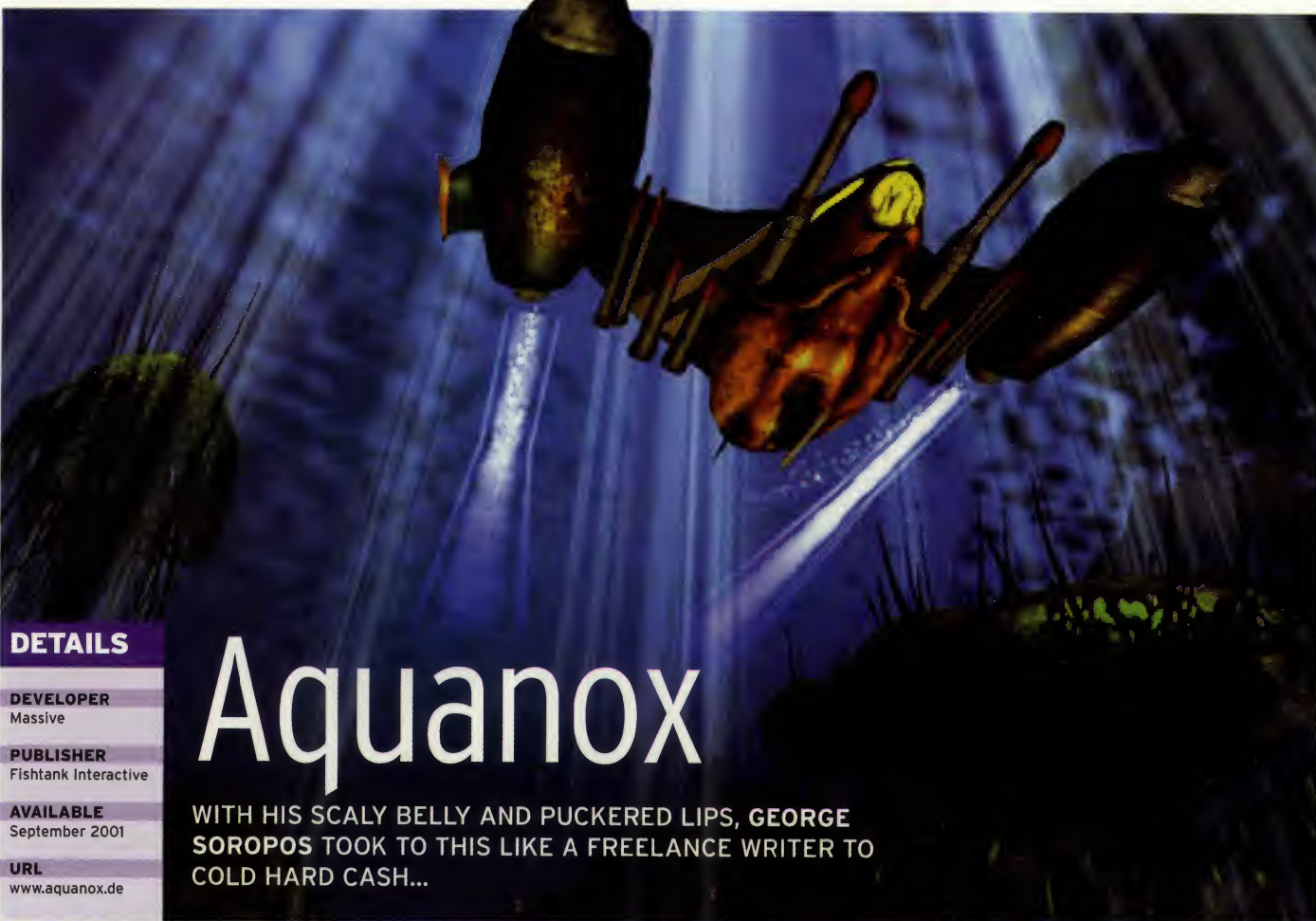
So we look forward to a number of games that use 3D engines, but freeze the camera in a top-down or isometric perspective. Warcraft 3 and Battle Realms both look very familiar to 2D traditionalists, but bring with them all the tricks and traps of 3D.

Of course, nowadays it's not just about how good a game looks. Examining the titles on the RTS roadmap, it's almost as if developers think we're sick of 'standard' RTS games, and feel we need a 'twist' to keep us interested. Sigma, for instance, doesn't offer a set of units, but has the player building new creatures and combining parts of old units to create new fighting beasts. And Conflict Zone adds the media to a volatile mix of terrorism and peacekeeping, so battle plans must be palatable for the Nine O'clock News.

In fact, it seems that atypical RTS is the future; only Warcraft 3 seems to be the odd one out. However, the success of the 2D Red Alert 2 among dozens of 3D titles in 2001, suggests that Warcraft 3, with its ultra-safe gameplay, will be another runaway success for Blizzard.

No matter whether or not these quirky games are accepted, continuing interest from developers shows that RTS is here to stay. And that's good news for gamers.

Anthony Fordham



DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Massive

PUBLISHER

Fishtank Interactive

AVAILABLE

September 2001

URL

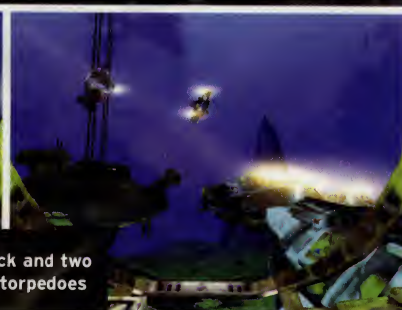
www.aquanox.de

Aquanox

WITH HIS SCALY BELLY AND PUCKERED LIPS, **GEORGE SOROPOS** TOOK TO THIS LIKE A FREELANCE WRITER TO COLD HARD CASH...



Lock, stock and two smoking torpedoes



Everyone knows how the best new music rarely ends up being the biggest selling. However not as many realise that the same phenomenon occurs in the games industry as well. Most assume that the biggest selling games are the best, but this is not always the case. A quick play of *Diablo II*, for example, soon puts that idea to sleep.

as military experiments have a penchant for doing, everything goes horribly wrong

Conversely not all the best games are big sellers, some even disappear into obscurity. Unloved and forlorn, they sleep in alleyways and eat out of wheelie bins. Archimedean Dynasty, developed by German company

Massive Development, was such a game. It was besieged by distribution problems in the US and therefore ignored by the US media and consequently the rest of the English speaking world. So why make a sequel? Because thankfully those Germans, God bless 'em, bought the game in droves.

Desk job

The year is 2666, six hundred or so years after man was forced underwater because of the ravages above, and five years after the events depicted in Archimedean Dynasty. Five years after you defeated the Bionts and (five years after AD was released!) became the most famous mercenary in all of Aqua (the name given to the underwater world by those living in it), a new threat is looming like a giant inflatable surf mat over the residents of the deep.

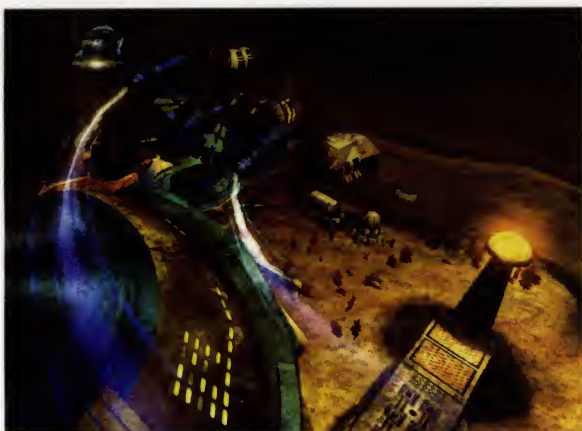
A latent civil war reigns in Neopolis, the capital of the Atlantic Federation and the armed forces supporting certain

revolutionaries have built a scientific station off Atacama City called "Brainfire".

Of course, as military experiments in games have a penchant for doing, everything goes horribly wrong and triggers off a cascade of serious incidents. Seaquakes shake the whole globe. Huge scary monsters creep out of their prisons and the shit well and truly hits the proverbial fan.

And waiting there to scrape it up and trowel it into a plastic bag is our man Flint. Emerald 'Dead-Eye' Flint to be precise. Half-man, half-dolphin, the laconic, rough-talking mercenary hero of Archimedean Dynasty has been made respectable with rank and privilege after his success against the bionts, but his desk job is quickly shelved when this new threat to Aqua rears its ugly head.

Like its predecessor, Aquanox weaves the missions together with conversations and story threads picked up when Flint visits the



The Aquanox engine fully supports Geforce3



I'd like to be under the sea



THAT'S KRASS!

If you visit a lot of 3D gaming and graphics sites you may have already seen one aspect of Aquanox which has been getting a lot of attention, the Aquamark benchmarking program. This benchmarking software, based on Aquanox's game engine, has gotten more press in the week it was released than Archimedean Dynasty did in all the gaming press everywhere!

Massive has developed what will probably be the first game engine on the market to fully support the GeForce 3. It's called Krass, and the Aquamark program, built with Krass, is showing people what Nvidia's new chipset is capable of. Vertex and pixel shading are fully utilised for the first time, the polygon count is a huge two million just for the terrain, and true scalability between APIs means that Krass will port to PS2, Gamecube and Xbox in a jiffy - an important consideration for potential licensees.

Succubus sub

Following on from the wonderful submarine designs and the interesting weapons found in Dynasty, Aquanox has nine totally new ships and a host of familiar and new weapon types. And for the sentimental among you, the trusty old Succubus (that's a submarine not a ghouly undead thing in a skimpy negligee) is apparently still around somewhere.

When you're operating in space, game designers tend to lose any thoughts of originality in designing weapons. A few different guns that shoot different coloured blobs and a couple of missiles is all you get. An underwater environment allows for much more interesting weapons, mainly of the torpedo variety; Aquanox features EMP torps, decoy torps, sonar homers, magnetic homers, high speed for dogfights, low speed for stealth... a veritable smorgasbord of tactical possibilities!

many different cities and locations such as bars and shops. However, Massive has made an effort to streamline the gameplay in Aquanox, providing more detailed information for the player so they don't end up wondering what to do next. The storyline is moved forward by some conversations and the developer didn't want players being baulked by not being able to find the next important character to talk to.

This sounds suspiciously like saying the game will be more linear than Archimedean Dynasty, which we hope isn't the case. Dynasty's non-linearity was one of the things which gave it its charm.

Aquanox's predecessor was released in the era of Doom and even though online gaming was around - just - it had no multiplayer support. Massive hopes to improve on that significantly by not only including the usual deathmatch free-for-alls but also a few squad-based game types that allow players to team up and use the strengths and weaknesses of different sub/weapon combinations.

The only game that has come close to Archimedean Dynasty in terms of immersion is probably Novalogic's Tachyon. Volition pinched a few ship designs from Dynasty for the Freespace games as well, but over the five years since the game was released nothing in this genre has matched it. Until now, that is. Or rather September when Aquanox is due for release.

Conquest Frontier Wars

THE SPACE RTS THAT SLIPPED THROUGH THE CRACKS.
JOHN DEWHURST ASKS PRODUCER ERIC PETERSON:
"WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR GAME?"

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Fever Pitch

PUBLISHER

TBA

AVAILABLE

TBA

URL

TBA

This space RTS set to change the strategy landscape might have been on the shelves six months ago. Following the public buy-out of Digital Anvil by Microsoft, Fever Pitch Studios was born to continue work on the dropped titles, *Conquest: Frontier Wars*, *Loose Cannon* and another unnamed title.

But all has been noticeably quiet in the meantime. We spoke with **Eric Peterson** (who is producing *Conquest* together with Erin Roberts) about losing a publisher and the events of the past six months.

"Well to be honest, it was a bit of a shock at first," says Peterson. "We have certainly been polishing *Conquest* since that time and it will be a much better experience for the player. When we started showing it to other publishers, they were all blown away. It was extremely gratifying to see people that had

never seen the project enjoy it right away."

Conquest has a new publisher (unnamed as yet) and will be released worldwide. Indeed, the debacle with Microsoft might turn out to be a blessing in disguise. Peterson says that although *Conquest* was finished before last Christmas, "we had to make some serious concessions to the overall game to make a Christmas release date. It would not have been the team's overall vision had we released. So after it was dropped, we set about putting a lot of the cut features back into the game."

balance. So we came up with three distinct ways of playing our RTS. We then incorporated those design ideas into *Conquest*."

The Terrans (humans) are the most balanced race of the three. Their units are based on traditional naval units, such as the battleship, the carrier, the missile cruiser, etc. They will rely on projectile weapons and have a good balance of speed and power.

The Mantids are an insect race. They use swarming tactics, preferring to battle from a distance with carriers, but do have some toe-to-toe ships. Their special weapons push enemy fleets away for protection and allow them to attack from a safe distance.

supply lines must be protected since without ammo and power any unit is vulnerable

SIXTEEN BATTLE SCENES

The inclusion of 16 battle maps is unprecedented in RTS gaming. Conflicts are fought on many different fronts (entire maps) at any one time, just as in real battle. The autonomous Admirals implement your orders whether you're watching the battle or elsewhere. Navigation between battles will be a big issue.



Three... my lucky number

Conquest features the familiar model of strategic battle between three distinct races in singleplayer missions and multiplayer. "When the team sat down and designed the game," Peterson begins, "we wanted to make sure we had a rock-paper-scissors

The Celareons are an energy-based race. They have perfected beam weaponry and prefer an ambush style of attack. They are also the only race that can create their own wormholes, allowing them to attack just about any location at any time - a considerable advantage.

ADMIRALS

AI assisted special units known as Admirals will marshal troops using the player's orders. Each

Admiral has powerful unique abilities, including damage and supply bonuses so there is a limit of six per side, explains Eric Peterson: "Any fleet with an admiral will be able to take out a superior fleet that does not have an admiral at its helm." They will also play a role as major characters in singleplayer missions.



In space no one can hear you hit pause to issue orders

Right-click to move selected unit to this location.



Right-click to move selected unit to this location.



Golly, look at the nebula effects!



More power

A principle aim in development was to create a game system where the important aspects were present without being all-consuming. These 'ghost' features allow a streamlining of the game and include supply of resources, researching and upgrading units.

Supply is a central concern in Conquest. Infrastructure needs to be in place, not only to produce but also maintain your fleet in combat, as Peterson explains: "Units in our game will run out of ammunition if not properly supplied. Re-supplying happens automatically as long as you are within the re-supply radius of a Headquarters, Supply depot, Repair platform, or supply ship."

Power is also a necessary supply and systems need to be connected to the power source via a Headquarters. Supply lines must be protected since without ammo and power any unit is vulnerable. Here is a more

realistic concept of resource protection in strategy. Resources will provoke the furious territory battles that we have come to expect in RTS gaming. These supply lines together with the intriguing concepts of Admirals and multiple battle maps (see Boxouts) hint at a depth in Conquest not yet seen in the genre.

Research will allow access to unique special weapons. These range from massive area of effect weapons to weapons that can repel large fleets, augmenting strategy in the game and offering new styles of play. Researching upgrades will automatically upgrade every relevant unit in your fleet, another so-called 'ghost' feature.

Extra time

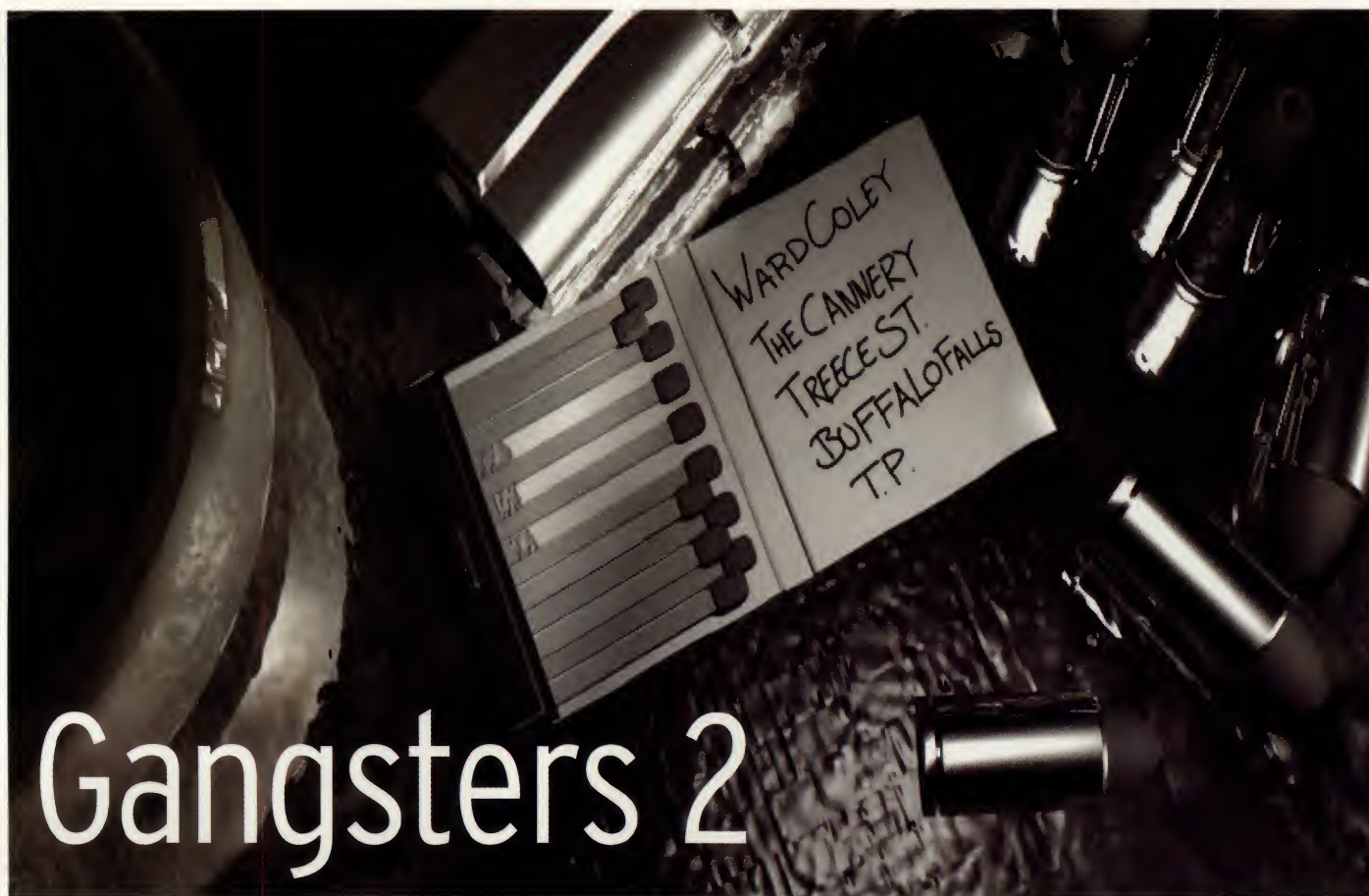
If design choices like strategies of supply, special weapons, multiple maps, and Fleet Admirals hit the mark, Conquest: Frontier Wars should be a stand-out title. The

impressive range of features and the fun, playable design ethic is incredibly exciting. The few extra months available to Fever Pitch has granted the opportunity to perfect the game, a refreshing change in an industry where all too often we see buggy, patch-hungry games released. A demo will be available shortly.

Fortunately it seems that being dropped by Microsoft and the consequent delay in the game's release hasn't dampened spirits at Fever Pitch. Peterson and his colleagues remain proud of what they have achieved.

"I think Conquest is a blast to play and our team has put tons of time into making it a very fun experience. There have been many late night shouting matches over the untimely death of a team member's fleet, and to me that says it is a good game."

Maybe Microsoft's loss will be everyone's gain. Let's hope so.



Gangsters 2

THE GANGSTA LIFE OF FAST WOMEN, FAST CRIME AND FAST WOMEN WAS TOO MUCH FOR JOHN DEWHURST

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Hothouse Creations

PUBLISHER
Eidos Interactive

AVAILABLE
July

URL
www.gangsters2.com

Note to aspiring game developers: an idea isn't enough. Great ideas don't make great games. Playing a mob boss is great idea. The flaw (and it's a doozy) in *Gangsters: Organized Crime* was in its execution (no pun intended). *Gangsters* was a clumsy, odd sort of strategy game and one of the lesser strategy titles of 1999.

But potential misused is potential nonetheless and there are great expectations for the next instalment, *Gangsters 2: Vendetta*. Hothouse Creations has maintained the premise of developing a criminal empire, but much of the game has received a radical make-over (cull, more like) leaving a good deal of room for other features that *Jason Stapleton*, Studio Manager at Hothouse, is all too happy to illuminate. The most

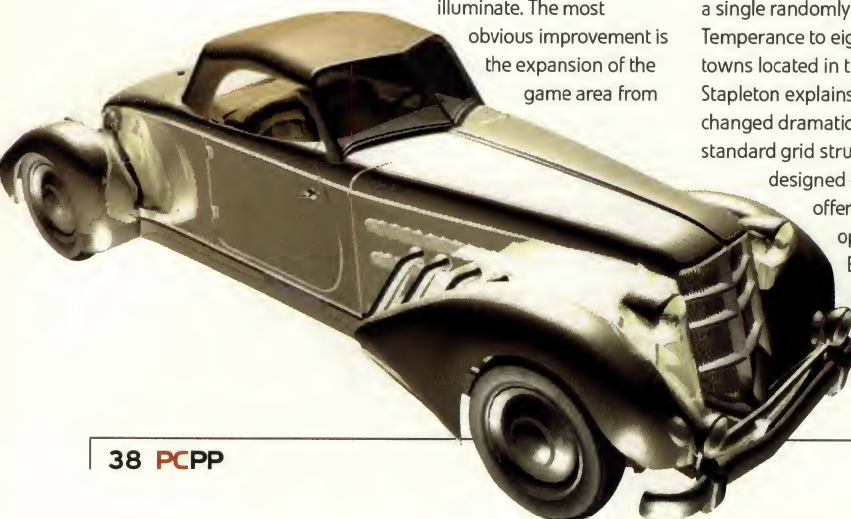
obvious improvement is the expansion of the game area from



a single randomly generated map of New Temperance to eighteen different cities and towns located in the State of Temperance. Stapleton explains: "City layouts have changed dramatically, the generated standard grid structure is gone. We have designed cities with layouts that offer more strategic opportunities for the player. By running an event timeline in each city we will be able to create plots and objectives that are unique for each city."

Woke up this morning...

Extending the premise of building up an empire, *Gangsters 2* also features a progressive storyline. "When Joey (your character) starts out he has nothing other than his father's old shotgun, a vehicle, an HQ and a friend called Landucci," says Stapleton. "Joey is on a mission to take down the guys that killed his father. As you progress through each scenario the storyline will open up to reveal lots of different twists and turns, eventually allowing Joey to come face to face with his ultimate enemy."



SPECIALISTS

Specialist characters can offer unique skills to your "businesses". These characters can be hired to perform important tasks like run a business operation or for one-off crimes. Check out just three of the line-up:



TONY 'ONE SHOT' FALCO is an expert hit man. If hired to make a hit, success is almost guaranteed but his rates are extortionate.



'FLORIDA BOB' is a hit man. The chances of him pulling of a hit are average but he is stealthy and loyal. If busted he won't squeal.



FRANKIE CONSTANTINE is the best plate engraver in Temperance. If hired to run counterfeit money operation profits will soar.



Their skills improve as the game progresses and so they need to be protected. The Family Tree feature allows valuable gang members to enter the "family". These gangsters travel to successive missions (new cities) with their mob boss. Important gang members are better prepared, Stapleton continues: "Each of your gang members can be escorted by his 'muscle', a group of up to four hoods that will flank him while he carries out orders. If your gangster gets into a gunfight the muscle will do their best to protect him. If your gangster is on the offensive the muscle will help against your target."

...Got Yourself a Gun

Weapons are differentiated more clearly in range, effect and accuracy. A machine gun will have a greater rate of fire but have less range than a rifle, for example. "We are also planning to allow bombs to be used in the streets against enemies as well as against buildings. Pistols with silencers will also be available for discreet hits!" Stapleton adds.



Linked missions form campaigns and give direction to the overall game. Hothouse is eager to point out that mission objectives will vary from the general to specific. This will include wiping out entire gangs and carrying out hits on individuals. An improved lifespan in crime strategy should be the result.

Stapleton is also keen to emphasise the improved interface: "The interface for Gangsters 2 is substantially different to the original game. Orders are mostly context sensitive. Street orders are given using an intelligent mouse pointer. For example if you select a Gangster and then select an empty parked, your gangster will get into it. If you don't own it and it is unlocked he will attempt to steal it!"

Each of the hoods have specific skills, making them more specialised and valuable.

when Joey starts out he has nothing but his father's shotgun, a vehicle, an HQ and a friend called Landucci

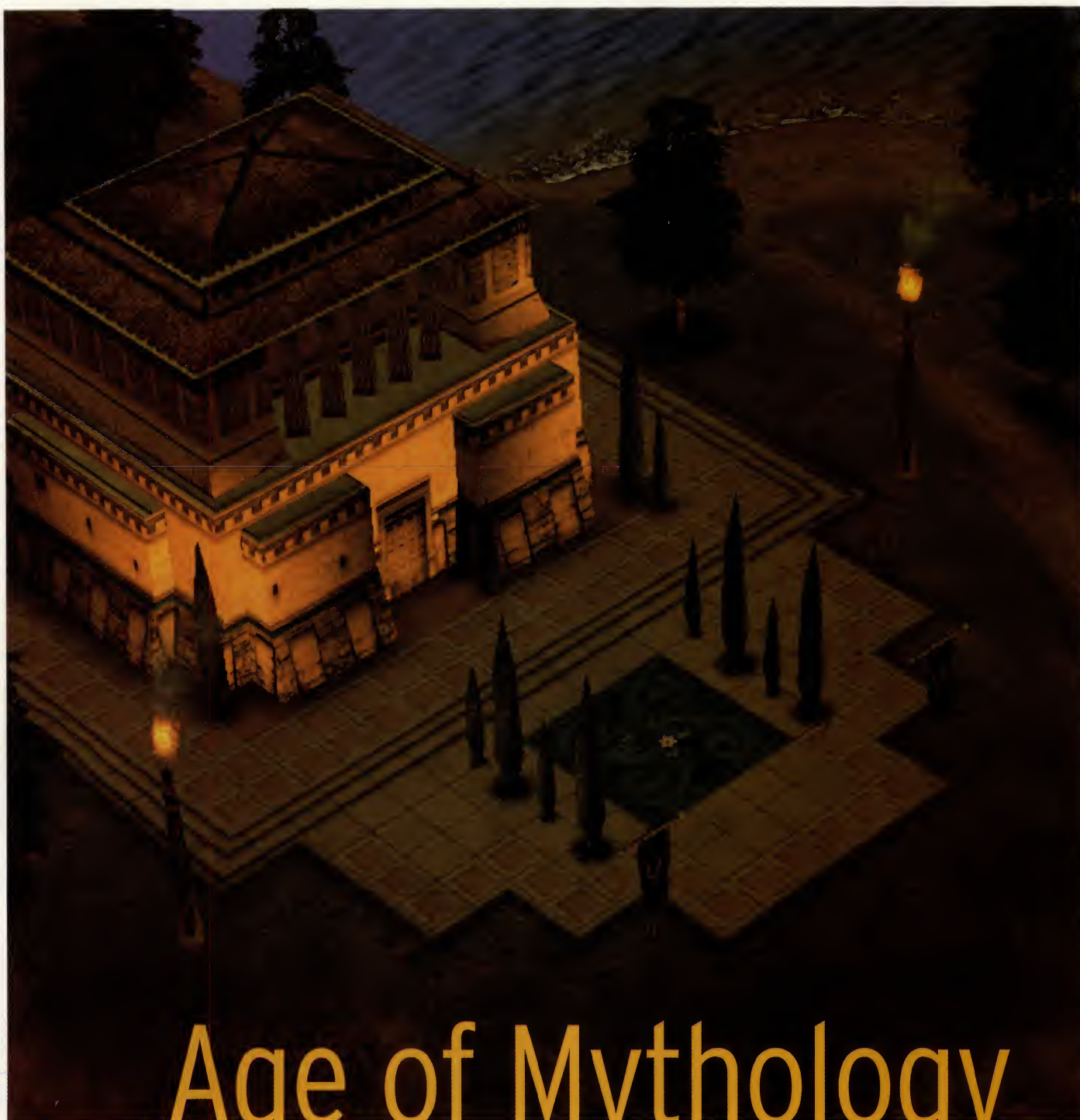
They might be safe crackers, hit men, kidnappers, sharp shooters or others. "Weapons in the hands of gangsters with special skills will be more effective," Stapleton reveals. "Arming your men effectively for their tasks will bring bigger rewards in Gangsters 2."

Within each mission, Gangsters 2 will progress through day and night. The city community responds according to the time of day. People leave their homes and travel to work in the morning and the streets are full of people in the daytime. At night time,

the streets are empty but criminals are out doing bad things! A stick up must take place in the day but some crimes benefit from the cover of night.

Perhaps one of more important points stressed by Hothouse is the better documentation, detailed tutorials and availability of help, with an onscreen advisor. Twice-daily city newspapers feature in the game. This will be the natural pause to the real-time phase and will allow players the chance to evaluate their strength and situation. The game will feature multiplayer and is currently being tested with eight players (though Stapleton points out this number may change).

If wishes were ponies, this game will eclipse its predecessor.



Age of Mythology

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Ensemble Studios

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DUE
TBA

URL
www.ensemble-studios.com

MORE OF A MYTH THAN A MAN, DAVID WILDGOOSE STRAPS ON BOTH THE GOLDEN FLEECE AND THE CODPIECE OF MIRTH AND NIPS NIMBLY BETWEEN CHARYBDIS AND SCYLLA TO SEE THE GAME THAT ISN'T AOEIII

When asked to reveal the secret to designing a good strategy game, Bruce Shelley's deceptively simple response could easily be mistaken for dissembling. "A series of interesting decisions with a satisfying conclusion" is how he puts it. Surely there's more to it than that? What about an epic time scale, online persistent state worlds, customisable units, historical accuracy, gorgeous 3D graphics, troop formations, and big tanks?

But perhaps he's right. Perhaps this simplicity is the key. After all, it's a mantra that has served him well throughout a career spanning twenty years in the games industry. While everyone else has obsessed over the latest buzzwords to highlight in their Powerpoint presentations and mark in bullets on the back of the box, Shelley has dedicated himself to perfecting game design.

From humble beginnings as a boardgame designer at Avalon Hill twenty

years ago, through working alongside Sid Meier during the halcyon days of Microprose in the late 80s and early 90s, before finally founding Ensemble Studios, Shelley has an enviable track record. Some of the classic games he has worked on include Civilization, Railroad Tycoon, F-19 Stealth Fighter, and the Age of Empires series.

Now, we can reveal a new title that will surely be added to that remarkable list of achievement: Age of Mythology.



It's a ruddy great boat
having a ruddy great
flaming rock ruddy well
chucked at it

THE REAL AGE III



With gods playing an important role and mythological creatures complementing the player's army, Ensemble decided it wouldn't be right to call its new game Age of Empires III. Empires is concerned with historical fact; Mythology with historical fantasy. Shelley stresses this was a choice they made themselves, not one forced upon them by Microsoft.

In fact, Ensemble had been working independently on Mythology for a year before the studio was recently subsumed to become yet another of Microsoft's firstparty developers (see p12). And, by the time you read this, the real reason for Mythology's title will be clear: Bruce Shelley will have unveiled Age of Empires III at E3. But more on that next month.



effective tactical fighting will centre more on appropriate use of god powers and special units

The Myth of Dental Hygiene

With the Age of Empires games - now one of Microsoft's most valuable franchises - Ensemble has firmly established itself as the reigning king of realtime strategy. The two cardinal titles in the series, along with their two expansion packs, offered an unsurpassed balance of economic management and tactical combat, all wrapped up in the enticing familiarity of human history. Civilization meets Warcraft had always seemed like an idea with more than a little potential; Ensemble did it first, and did it best.

But even the greatest of games have their share of flaws. And Age of Empires II: Age of Kings was no exception.

"There are a few things in retrospect that we could have done differently in Age of Kings," says **Greg Street**, Age of Mythology's designer. "One item that gets

mentioned a lot around the offices is that, like most RTS games, Age of Kings sometimes devolves into a race for who can get their economy going the fastest."

Thus, when Shelley, Street and the rest of the Ensemble team commenced work on Age of Mythology, they identified the (few, it must be said) errors made in the past, and then set about correcting them. Such an evaluation process is vital for success, as history has many lessons to teach. Doubly so for a developer such as Ensemble, whose games all have a basis in historical fact.

To negate the above limitation pinpointed by Street, Ensemble has made a concerted effort to bolster the impact of tactical manoeuvring on the battlefield. And, in a happy coincidence, this redirected attention also serves to highlight the historical focus betrayed in the new game's title.

"One of the features we look forward to developing in Age of Mythology is a more tactical element to combat," says Street. "For example, if I ask the gods of my civilisation to call down a lightning storm on my enemies, then my opponent is going to have to pay some attention to the combat and not just mindlessly

crank out more and more units to fight."

Shelley elaborates: "The tactical feel of combat will be changed most by the use of god powers and mythological units. At least that is how we feel today (laughs). Certain god powers could have a tactical effect on a large group of enemies. Mythological creatures have special abilities and require some micro-management to be used effectively. The sum of these effects will be something like trying to use Monks, Trebuchets, and Siege Onagers in Age of Kings.

"Those units have important uses but required special attention," he continues. "Part of the challenge for players will be learning to use the new powers and units effectively. We think now that effective tactical fighting will centre more on appropriate use of available god powers and special units."





And lo, Zeus was yea and verily mighty pissed off



MONKEYING AROUND

Who says game developers don't have a sense of humour? When asked what Age of Mythology has that its realtime strategy rivals do not, designer Greg Street and producer Bruce Shelley found it hard to extract tongue from cheek.

"Monkeys," says Street. "At least I haven't seen any in the other games."

"Monkeys are undisciplined, impish, and highly excitable," Shelley adds. "They speak in gibberish and live in trees, and they're continually seeking amusement and bananas. That pretty much sums up the job description for a game developer. Look for monkeys in Age of Mythology - as a professional courtesy!"



The Myth of Aerobic Exercise

Unlike Age of Empires, Mythology is not confined to a particular time-scale. Rather it depicts a nebulous ancient Earth untouched by reason and the Enlightenment. It's a time when fear and irrationality conjugate and myths and legends are born. As such, Ensemble is able to play fast and loose with realism and historical authenticity. Expect to see bearded Norse giants flattening foot soldiers whilst being bombarded by meteor storms.

You play one character, so you don't choose a civilisation at the start

Nonetheless, even when the subject matter is as outlandish as this, there is an awful lot of research to be done to ensure that such fantasy is as factual as possible. Remember: at one time people actually believed this stuff.

"It might seem that since we are going with a mythological theme, we would be able to chuck history out the window and incorporate whatever units and buildings we want into the game," says Street.

"However, we have built a reputation for our attention to historical detail and we did not want to forsake our roots with Age of Mythology. We have developed a pretty extensive library - every book we could find in the local stores or on the Internet. There is a lot of material to draw upon for mythology."

Yet, crucially, when it comes down to deciding whether to design something this way (because it makes sense from an historical perspective) or that way (because it makes for a more balanced game), it's obviously the latter which always wins out. Street wholeheartedly agrees:

"The short answer is that gameplay always wins. We make great games, not historical simulations. In Age of Kings, for

example, it would be hard to argue that any unit should be able to defeat the Mongol horse archer, since the Mongols defeated virtually everyone they ever came into contact with. But where is the fun in a strategy game where everyone always wants to play the Mongols? We use history for ideas and details, but we don't let it dictate what we can and can't include in the game."

The Myth of Health Food

In the relaxed, anachronistic period of Mythology, the featured civilisations include the ancient Egyptians, classical Greeks and Norse from the Dark Ages, with more to be revealed later. However, at least in the singleplayer campaign, don't expect to be able to choose a civilisation when a new game is selected.

The starting point of the single player campaign is a famous event in the ancient

Check out the size of that
redhead approaching from
the norse west! (bwaha)



Dark Age, sometime around 1000BC," says Shelley. "You play one character throughout the campaign, so you don't choose a civilisation at the start or anything like that. We have tried to weave storylines from several famous ancient myths into the

campaign. There will be small unit actions and larger army encounters, and there will be quests. The main character will be joined by heroes who aid him in his campaign."

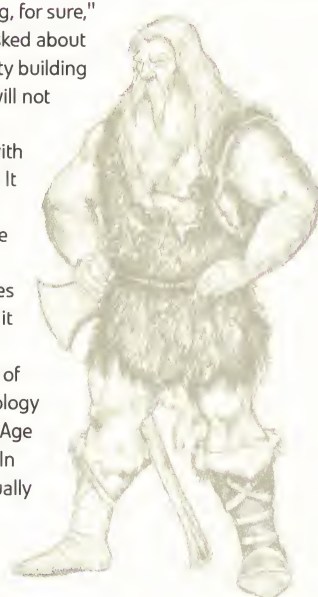
Throughout the campaign, players will shape their civilisation by choosing what gods to worship as they advance through the ages. Each god confers godly powers upon the player (such as the meteor or lightning storm) and provides mythological creatures to bolster the empire.

By choosing gods, the player can choose between economic or military benefits, thus influencing the strengths and weaknesses of the player's empire. Some creatures operate more like artillery, others more like Monks; some are slow but powerful, some are fast and not so powerful; some have area effects, etc. Mixing and matching gods, and keeping aware of what your opponents are choosing, will help players gain advantages in combat.

"The campaign will require some

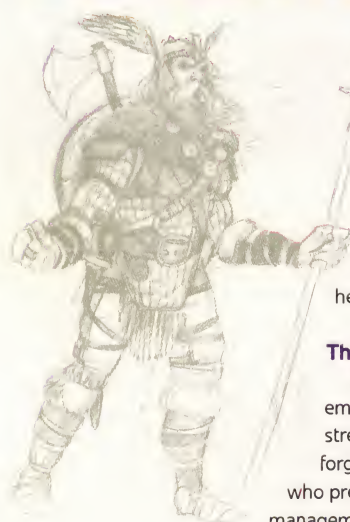
experience with fighting, for sure," replies Shelley, when asked about the balance between city building and combat. "Players will not get through it without learning how to fight with large and small groups. It will include lots of help and artificial intelligence adjustments so that everyone who really tries should be able to enjoy it and complete it."

"I think the diversity of strategies makes Mythology feel very different from Age of Kings," adds Street. "In Kings, your strategy usually came down to generating as many resources as you could to make a gigantic army. In Mythology you can still use that





Sam is seriously out of his element



strategy, but you can also focus your resources on fewer, but much more powerful mythological units. You could opt to spend most of your efforts generating favour from your patron deity in order to call down powers such as meteors or tornados on their heads."

The Myth of the Perfect Date

Despite the understandable emphasis on the military, Street stresses that Ensemble hasn't forgotten about the kind of player who prefers to concentrate on resource management and the economy: "One of the things we discovered about the Age series was that a certain component of our fans liked to play the game SimCity style. That is, they wanted to just build their cities and not worry about what an opponent was

a new game mode for 'builder' players is still on the drawing board, but not far enough along yet to discuss

doing. We are offering a new game mode for these players in Age of Mythology."

Unfortunately, according to Shelley, this new game mode for 'builder' players is still on the drawing board and not far enough along to discuss. However, he did say it will be a game type choice or a parameter that can be set in the standard random map game. Of course, as Street is equally quick to point out, "Most of the hardcore, online crowd wants to fight to the death, so we offer plenty of options to annihilate your foes." Decisions, decisions...With Age of Mythology and Age of Empires III on the horizon, perhaps the most interesting decision strategy gamers will have to make is which one to buy first. Either way, with Bruce Shelley at the helm of both, there's bound to be plenty of satisfaction whichever you choose. We will bring you more details on both games in the coming months.

AVOIDING SEQUELITIS


Age of Mythology designer, Greg Street, on the perils of sequels:

"I think if you don't start changing your design, fans are going to accuse you of 'sequelitis'. Our industry, sadly, is littered with the corpses of great franchises that were beaten to death by repetitive sequels. Age of Kings used the same engine as Age of Empires, so the games feel similar. Age of Mythology uses an entirely new, 3D engine. We have so many new features planned, it would be hard to go into them all, so I will just list a good one: your towns automatically look better the larger they get. An early town may be little more than a group of shacks, but by the time it evolves into a city, it has roads connecting major buildings, statues and fountains and other bits of eye candy added automatically."

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I-War 2

Edge of Chaos

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Particle Systems

PUBLISHER
Infogrames

AVAILABLE
July

URL
www.independence-war2.com

STAUNCH INDEPENDENT, ANTHONY FORDHAM STRAPS ON THE BOOSTER ROCKETS AND HEADS FOR THE EDGE OF CHAOS...

The original *Independence War: Enter Infinity* marked an important but largely overlooked milestone in the history of gaming. It was the first truly serious spaceship simulator, a title that attempted to accurately create a true sensation of controlling a large space craft in a

but perhaps fill the void left by the uncertain future of *Freelancer*.

Whereas every other space combat sim on the shelves puts the player in control of a light and acrobatic space fighter at the expense of plausibility, the original *I-War* focused on the operation and control of a much larger vehicle, the hundred-metre Dreadnaught-class Corvette. While still perhaps falling short of 'real' space combat - which will surely resemble submarine warfare more than anything else - being in control of a huge ship affected by inertia and momentum was more immersive for serious space nuts.

I-War 2 continues in the fine tradition of its predecessor, with a highly developed

physics model designed to create a very different combat experience from the usual fighter/mothership model. While it's easy to bandy about terms such as 'realism' and 'simulation' it must of course be remembered that space combat doesn't actually exist beyond the crazed dreams of Ronald Reagan and his *Star Wars* project.

Seriously elite

While *I-War* attempted - and succeeded - to be a serious military simulation of a fictitious weapons platform, *I-War 2* will move into a more open-ended *Elite*-style play model, while maintaining the simulation elements of space flight.

The original *I-War*'s story was fairly simple, involving the ongoing conflict between the Commonwealth of Man and a splinter group

space combat doesn't actually exist beyond the crazed dreams of Ronald Reagan

combat situation. The game succeeded in this aim very well, but was nevertheless largely overlooked by a fickle public. Now Particle Systems is back with a sequel that looks set not only to impress,

The gorgeous cutscenes use the ingame engine





of rebels known as the Indies. I-War 2 has a more complex and involving story, explains PartideSystems' Producer **Roger Godfrey**.

"The story starts out with the player character Cal Johnston working alongside his father Felix. Cal witnesses Felix being murdered in cold blood by the villainous gangster Caleb Maas. The computer Al Jefferson Clay is left to raise the newly traumatised Cal; but quite soon Cal is placed on a path leading him to take his revenge on Maas.

However, other events soon overtake Cal and his friends as the Badlands star cluster is plunged in to the depths of a bitterly fought war. Cal's actions could lead to freedom from tyrannical oppression or lead to the utter annihilation of humanity."

The immediate difference between the universes of the two games is that while I-War was a linear mission-based game, I-War 2 will use an open-ended universe, where the player is free to travel at will, investigating different star systems and uncovering plot elements in their own time. Godfrey explains the rationale behind switching to this play model.

"We wanted to move away from the linear mission structure that we previously

had and give the player more freedom. In Independence War 2 this extra freedom provides the player with a much more interesting gameplay experience. A significant part of the game centres on piracy and this is something that we could only create convincingly if the player has complete freedom."

Ample parking

The I-War 2 universe will consist of more than a hundred different star systems, each with its own collection of planets, stations, asteroid bases and other debris. "Initially the player only has access to one star system," says Godfrey. "This might not seem like a large area but we have massive amounts of planets, space stations, moons, asteroids and other bodies floating around. As the player progresses through the game more of the universe is opened up." At no time will the player feel compelled to travel in any particular direction, unless an offered mission piques their interest.

Of course the proof of I-War 2's gameplay pudding is in the combat. Godfrey assures us that the core of Particle Systems' combat remains unchanged, but the options for the player have been

greatly enhanced. "The biggest change is that we have really expanded the types of weapons that you can equip your ship with," Godfrey says. "For example we now have cutting beams that can be used to apply massive amounts of damage to enemy ships.

"The experience of combat is similar to that in Independence War in that all the ships have mass and inertia. Being a successful commander is still as much about tactical thought and timely deployment of weapons as well as exercising those pilot reflexes."

LEAVE YOUR HAT ON

I-War had a complex but powerful control method, with many functions accessible through the joystick eight-way hat. I-War 2 continues this methodology, but takes it even further. Particle Systems has created an in-ship control system that is almost completely dependent on the joystick hat.

"The controls for the original took time to learn so many players were put off," says Producer Roger Godfrey, "With this new game you can now access every single system on board your ship without taking your hand off the joystick using our new Command Menu system. The command menu is controlled using the Hat Switch (or cursor keys) and the trigger." This results in a very intuitive - and very fast - method of navigating the many menus and sub menus in the game.





JEFFERSON'S STARSHIP

"It is the relationship dynamics between the characters that keep the story interesting and keep driving the player on," says Godfrey. One of the central characters in the I-War universe is Jefferson Clay. The odd thing about Clay is that he's dead, resurrected as an AI inside the player's starship. "As video game characters go Clay is quite interesting," Godfrey continues, "Not least because he is a computer simulation of a long dead

legendary Captain from the original Independence War. Fans of the original game really took to Clay, and so did the Independence War team so we dusted him off and brought him out for another adventure." He's a little bit like the consciences in *Black & White*, only much cooler.



Players will be able to configure ships at hidden asteroid resupply bases, and outfit all manner of new equipment, everything from fusion rings to heatsinks. And naturally, for those not interested in tweaking, the local AI can outfit the ship in minutes, carefully tailored to a particular task, be it combat, recon or trading.

And speaking of ships, the original I-War offered only one chassis from which to deal death, but I-War 2 will offer four. From the Storm Petrel, a lightly armoured scouting vessel, to the classic PatCom light attack craft from the first game, all the way to the mighty heavy corvette, a serious chunk of ship if ever we've seen one.



Motley crew

In addition to ships, the player will also pick up crew along the way from a pool of NPCs who can be found lurking in various seedy space rangers' bars. Each crew member will be suited to a different task, be it engineering or weapons control. Also, these crew members will be able to pilot detachable turret fighters which not only serve as blaster emplacements on the hull of the ship, but as the name suggests, can also detach and become a manoeuvrable short-range fighter used to harry opponents.

One of the favourite elements of I-War was the crazed paintjobs of the Indie starships; each enemy vessel was gaudily daubed with bright colourful graffiti with slogans such as "Catch me if you can!" and ships had names like "Under New Ownership" and "Death and Taxes". Unfortunately, nowadays, the descendants of the Indies are far more conservative. "The

new game is set 100 years after the end of the Independence War," explains Godfrey, "and all the old Indie ships now have nice 'New Alliance Navy' paint schemes. Very tasteful! But you never know what ships might crop up..."

Finally, the single most disappointing aspect of the original game was its lack of multiplayer support inside a combat system that seemed to be begging for it. Fortunately then, Particle Systems is paying close attention to providing excellent multiplayer opportunities in I-War 2.

"We will be shipping the game with several different types of multiplayer game," says Godfrey, "There is the standard deathmatch, a team deathmatch game, capture the flag and Bomb Tag.

"Theoretically our codebase can support a multiplayer campaign. However this will not be shipping with the game as we don't have capacity within the team to



The intuitive interface is as slick as the graphics



Satellite of Love...



asteroid base. There were literally hundreds of ships going about their daily business to and fro, dropping off cargo, docking with each other, jumping out of the system.

After familiarising ourselves with the controls we headed for the base, only to have the ship taken over by Space Traffic Control and automatically decelerated to port speed of 250 klicks. We were then free to approach other ships, dock with the base or bring up the starmap and select a new destination, all using nothing more than the joystick hat and trigger.

Mormon drive

One of the more impressive elements in this early build was making an LDS trip to a nearby planet. LDS, the Linear Displacement System allows for 'short-range' hyperkinetic travel. Short-range of course being the millions of kilometres between planets. Rather than taking weeks to make the trip, the ship skips in and out of hyperdrive to travel the distance in moments. We headed out into black, featureless space, engaged LDS, pointed at where our navcomp told us the planet should be, and a few minutes

later

it was suddenly there - huge and unavoidable. It felt real.

I-War 2 is shaping up to be a very impressive title indeed, offering a serious space sim in a sea of X-Wing rip-offs. With a free roaming open-ended universe, a brace of ships to fly,

we would not be surprised if somebody created the space-faring equivalent of Counter-Strike for Independence War 2

plenty of characters with which to interact and a story to rival the greatest of space operas, I-War 2 really looks set to make us forget all about that continuously absent hussy Freelancer. Bring it on.

create the missions; finishing the single player game is a massive undertaking and is consuming all our time.

"However we are intending to open up our mission scripting system to the wider community. Some of the fan mods produced for the original Independence War were very impressive so we would not be surprised if somebody created the space faring equivalent of Counter-Strike for Independence War 2."

Hands off my stick!

We were able to examine a pre-alpha build of the game, which to be honest had a lot of difficulty getting past the first part of the first mission without crashing, but the most immediate impression we received was of a universe that was very much alive.

We found ourselves in space in a tiny command module with no weaponry to speak of, looking down on an enormous

Dungeon Siege



DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Gas Powered Games

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

AVAILABLE
September 2001

URL
www.dungeonsiege.com

USUALLY DOWN IN THE UNDERGROUND, DANIEL STAINES EMERGES INTO THE HARSH LIGHT OF DAY LONG ENOUGH TO HACK HIS WAY THROUGH MICROSOFT'S LATEST

"We're not really a Tolkien world, or a D&D world, we're a mix of everything that we like; with no rules that restrict us from doing really wacky shit if we want to.

"We have an area in our world called the Goblin Inventor's Hideout. This is filled with some pretty wild stuff, yet it fits into our world nicely. That's where you can find the medieval minigun... and now, we have a whole series of weapons in the same line, grenade launcher, flamethrower, etc. I think people will have a blast, to say the least."

Talking to Chris Taylor is like talking to the

let's imagine that you didn't give a rat's arse about the story, then you can ignore it and just kill everything in sight

chief madcap goblin and Gas Powered Games seems like the Inventor's Hideout. There is the energy, excitement, eccentricity (bordering on a blatant disregard for sanity) and sense of conceptual recklessness that either produces genius or causes heads to explode.

Although he worked on several award-winning games beforehand, Taylor became a gaming identity for his work on Total

Annihilation, which was seen as an RTS that brought something new to the genre when everyone else was just there for the ride. He is also famous for revelling in media attention like a goblin in... er... a Jim Henson/David Bowie movie.

Lively pace

Dungeon Siege puts players in a fantasy RPG, exploring a world, having adventures, gaining treasure, building a party and doing all that usual stuff. If it seems a little too "usual" just remember the Goblin Inventor's Hideout. Gas Powered Games has its own way of doing things and that way seems to be fast-paced and lively.

"I guess it's just a designer's preference," says designer Taylor.

"We like action, but we like a rich and compelling world, too. It doesn't mean we don't take a few moments here and there to take a break from the action, but overall, it's an 'Action Fantasy RPG', and we are heavy on the action. We don't want to have the player stop to do a bunch of housekeeping."

The game is filled with group commands like making everyone swig potions at the same time; there are pack mules so the action doesn't grind to a halt as you carefully weigh up what loot to take and what to leave;



Speak softly and carry a big stick

vendors offer a money-back guarantee in case you make a hasty or unwise click.

Even the plot is designed to keep things moving. The player has to discover why hordes of monsters have turned up and are trashing the land. As the monster tally racks up a deeper (and just as action intensive) mystery unfolds.

Fun and action are the catch words. And if you want it to be as mindless as goblin reality TV, then Taylor says that's okay, too: "The story unfolds as you move through the world and quests are completed. However, let's imagine that you didn't give a rat's arse about the story, then you can ignore it and just kill everything in sight. It's all up to the player, we never block the forward progression of the player due to a story requirement."

Farmboy, polish my saddle

Start off as a humble but cute farmboy and work your way to being a Dread Pirate Rob in no time. Maybe you want to start as a

Stricter beach patrols will be a feature of 2001 Schoolies Week

MULTITUDINOUS MULTI



Dungeon Siege wants to offer everything to everyone when it comes to playing with friends, it would seem. Want a game that lasts for hours exploring the singleplayer game in co-op or competitive modes? Fair enough. Want a Quake-style deathmatch? Cool.

From the staging area players can set victory conditions, such as capture the flag (or castle, or item), deathmatch and kill the sorcerer; they can choose maps; choose game options and so forth. When you consider the options the editor opens up, variety shouldn't be a problem. "Hopefully there will be something for everyone," Taylor adds.

farmgirl and develop into a Dread Archer Annie or whatever.

As the curtain raises you find yourself in the farming trade and about to be battling for your life against creatures trying to farm your organs for decoration. After that point the player is free to develop their little protagonist as they please.

Character creation is easy, as Taylor explains: "You can choose sex, hair, pants, shirt, skin colour and name. These are intentionally all things which have no impact on the way the character will develop in the game.

"We use a skill-based class system, so the important aspects of the character develop depending on how the player uses them in the game."

Characters wielding a lot of hand-to-hand weapons develop their skill in them as well as their strength. Archers build up dexterity as they grow more deadly with their projectile weapon of choice (grenade launcher, anyone?) and so on. This goes for

every character in your group.

Although you start off alone, you are soon joined by others if you are interested, rescued or befriended by more (or considerably less) conventional means. Your party will be able to have up to eight members if you want to go for the siege feel, or you can keep the group small. Even with a full roster, Gas Powered Games has done its darnedest to make sure controlling the group doesn't slow the thrills.

Here I was imagining the game flying along at a cracking pace, the outrageously over-the-top-battle raging, with the promised huge spell effects roaring around, and your eight members being moved with RTS group clicks and then a mage lashes out with a typical mage-y spell and half the party falls to being turned to toads; friendly - frogging - fire, if you will.

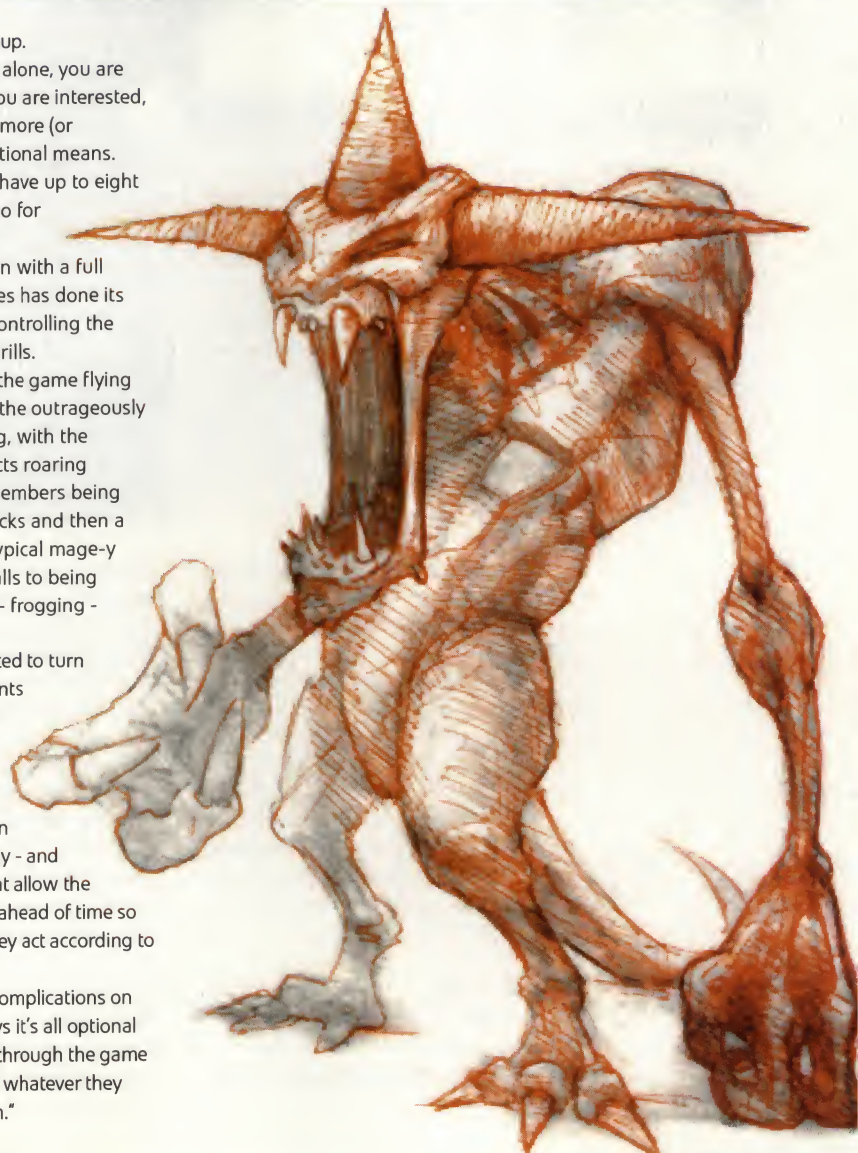
"Currently we have opted to turn off friendly fire. This prevents a lot of toads for the most part," Taylor answers smoothly.

"We have things like party formations - that can easily be selected on the fly - and other Field Commands that allow the player to set the party up ahead of time so when they are in battle they act according to the player's wishes."

Not wanting to force complications on players he shrugs and says it's all optional though, you can "plough through the game with the characters doing whatever they want, we don't care which."



This ain't no lake, and she ain't no lady





A WORLD OF YOUR OWN

Dungeon Siege will put all of the tools of the mad workshop at gamers' fingertips. It will go online for free download when the game is finished. Take it away, Chris Taylor: "The Siege Editor is the exact tool that we used to build the game. It is not a simplified version, it's the real deal. You can create a new world limited only by your hard drive and your imagination. You can populate it with monsters and create scenarios for your friends. You can create little movies to play when you reach a part of the world, and the possibilities are huge. We are also talking to Discreet about GMax so players could possibly create their own meshes and animations to drop into the game as well. Everything in Dungeon Siege is data-driven so Total Conversions are a huge possibility as well."



Ploughing through it is likely to induce some stiff casualties but, again, heaven forbid this should slow you down unless your loss is a total write off. When characters are knocked down to zero health they fall unconscious, then, when the battle is over, they get back up... a little shaken, a little stirred, altogether vodka martini-like, in fact. They will even heal over time or you can speed up the process with magic. On rare occasions something will actually kill a character and then you just have to scoop up the skull and then have them raised via a spell.

Worldly Ways

The world of Dungeon Siege is not arcade Gauntlet. It isn't just wave after wave of monsters. The Gas Powered goblins have created a real fantasy world full of

interesting characters, back story and magic. They have remained tight-lipped on most of the setting to keep it a surprise, but they have discussed one particular character to give you a feel for their twisted little fantasy world. Ethan Stonebridge is the founder of the first town you come across. He's great for a chat, especially politics. The locals call him Old Stony. Thing is, he's an animated head.

A goblin hitman bumped him off after he conned some local goblins in a particularly embarrassing manner. They ran off with his head, and much later it turned up half a world away and became magically animated and made its way home. Hence the town of Stonebridge has not a single bridge, stone or otherwise, but it does have Old Stony.

Players will visit lava flows, glaciers, lush forests, as well as Goblin Inventor Hideouts.

Players will also walk into huge castles under siege, triggering carnage on an impressive scale, more often found in pure RTS games, if they decide to wade in.

Although the game shuttles forward at a great rate and focuses on this explosive action there is a path laid through the world which is the main story, but players are free to explore off the track as well (where secret dungeons might be found to lurk).

This is all set in a "continuous" world. Sure we live in a continuous world, without load screens, and I make sure Taylor knows I know as I ask him how it works in his game. He seems excited, like I get some difficult to grasp point:

"Ha! Ya, we do, and it works pretty good in real life, so we thought we'd duplicate it for our game."

As you enter a dungeon, for example, the camera sinks down with you and the ground

Manly Beach, New Year's Day and the clean-up operation is well underway



We've got a bone to pick with you... bwaha



becomes transparent until all you are left with is the flagstone walls and floor holding the dirt out.

Taylor continues, "We wanted this technology because we didn't like

getting pulled out of the experience at the end of every level in games we played in the past. With technology as advanced as it is, we saw no reason not to utilise the hard drive to continually stream the data in while the player walks his characters through the world. So far this has proven to have a huge impact on the way the game feels."

Lights, Camera, Action

Dungeon Siege does have a feel to it. It feels like more fun than a barrel full of - you guessed it - goblins. The interface is flexible and everything can be tied to hotkeys. Items can be transferred between all of the character's inventories quickly and easily. The whole world is detailed and in total 3D and you can pick up treasure by selecting an area like you would grab units in an RTS.

"We created crazy weapons that blow lots of stuff up, and spells to match," Taylor butts in, breaking the flow of this now increasingly long-winded conclusion.

"We added miniguns and other contraptions to really mix up the battles... oh, and stuff can catch fire and spread across an area, or flammable monsters. These are a few off the top of my head," he says without any remorse for the



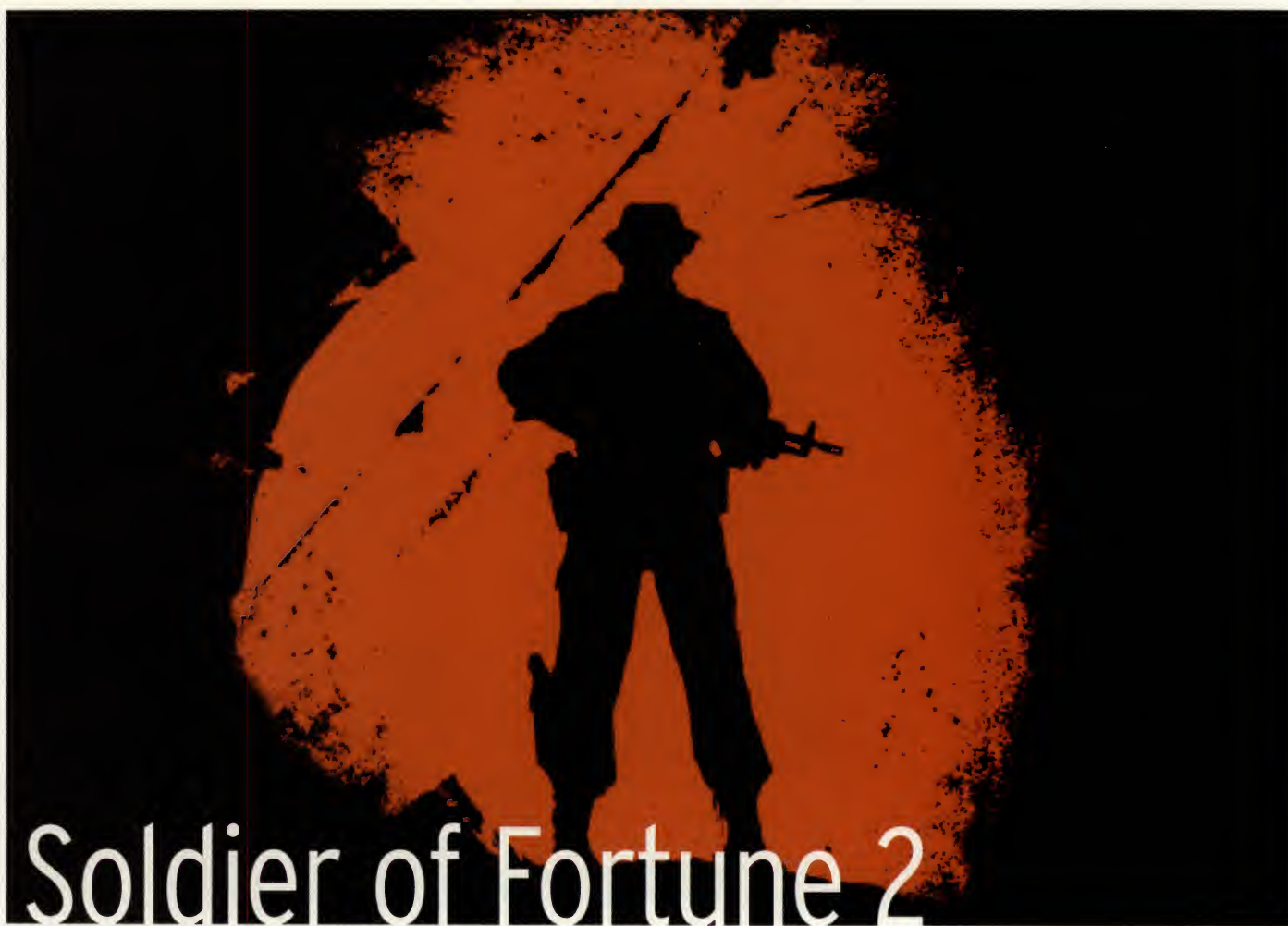
feel for the wrap up tone.

The monsters are more than just fodder; they already call for buddies, chase you around and even follow you out of a dungeon and into town if you let them.

players are free to explore off the track as well (where secret dungeons might be found to lurk

Taylor says the development team is even messing with monster formations as well, with everything from the fearsome phalanx to devious boxing formations.

Dungeon Siege might look like an all action machine but under the exterior a lot of strange and mystical cogs have been hammered together to make this impressive Gas Powered contraption. The funny thing is that it looks like the mad thing is all going to click together instead of causing heads to explode.



Soldier of Fortune 2

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Raven Software

PUBLISHER
Activision

AVAILABLE
1st Qtr 2002

URL
www.ravensoft.com

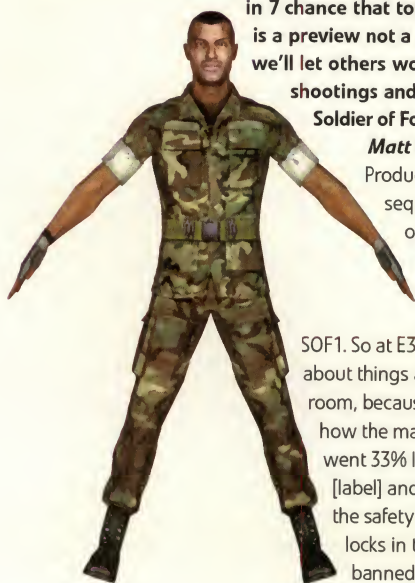
JOHN DEWHURST'S PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN HIS SWORD, BUT IS STILL THE HARDEST MAN ON THE PCPP CREW. BESIDES, HE LOOKS GREAT IN CAMOUFLAGE PAINT...

Last year was ablaze with self-righteous indignation. While journalists like myself were happy to sit back, ponder the social ramifications of ultra-violent games and denounce said ultra-violence, all over this brown land Australians played *Soldier of Fortune*. Sermons are for Sunday and there's a 6 in 7 chance that today's not Sunday. This is a preview not a P&F newsletter, so we'll let others worry about school shootings and such things. On to *Soldier of Fortune 2*.

Matt Morton, Associate Producer of the contentious sequel, says of the *Soldier of Fortune* franchise:

"Raven had a lot of fun with the original Quake II technology in

SOF1. So at E3 we were a little worried about things and had it in the back room, because we weren't too sure how the market would react. We went 33% larger on the ESRB [label] and the warnings, and had the safety locks and the parental locks in there. But we were banned in Germany, and

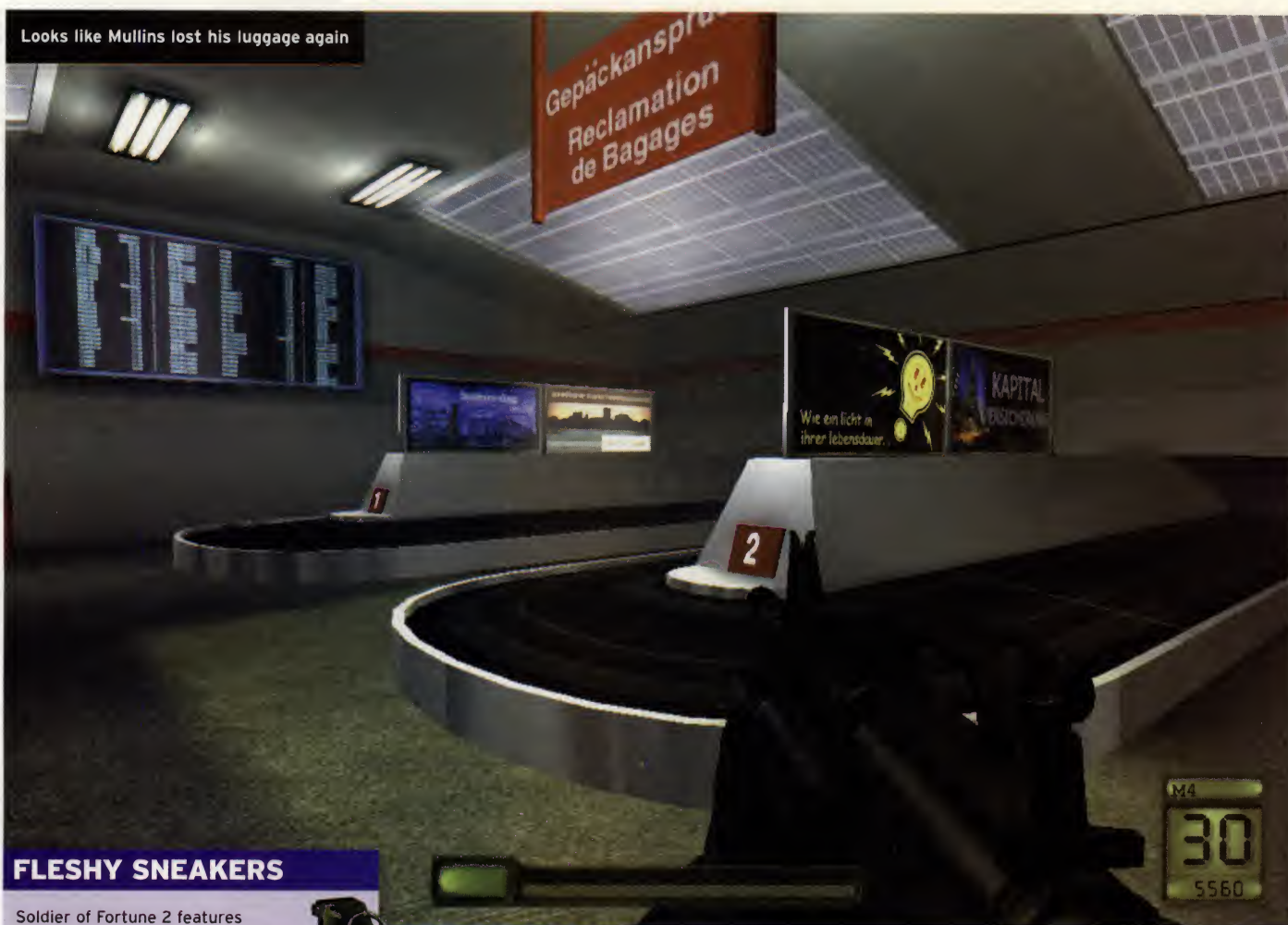


Canada was a little reluctant too. We tried everything we could do with violence locks, did everything we could... However, it was and is a mature game - it's very realistic. [See: *In Case it's Sunday*] And that's what made everyone sit up and take notice.

"The nice thing about *Soldier of Fortune 2* is we don't shy away from the 'ultra realism'. However, we're still going to do

our best to keep everybody happy, with the same plan as before - be very careful, make sure the people who aren't supposed to be playing this game, aren't playing this game. Actually, customer support has a stringent way of ensuring this - you have to fax your drivers license to us proving that you're over the age of 17 before we'll tell you how to fix the parental lock-out."

Looks like Mullins lost his luggage again



FLESHY SNEAKERS

Soldier of Fortune 2 features environmental interaction, silent weapons and a crouch option. This will offer an alternative style of play to the tried-and-true frontal assaults of the original. Hiding in the shadows and using silent weapons like knives and silenced handguns means missions can be completed in a more covert style. For emphasis, many of the game screens released have been in the dark: pitch-black jungles, deserted warehouse, etc. To see a practical effect on the missions, we'll have to wait for the final version.



We've never seen an airport that empty

Let's go Shopping

Soldier of Fortune 2 continues the story of John Mullins, a 'military consultant' working for the top-secret anti-terrorist group known only as the Shop. Like the original, SOF2 sees Mullins hunting all manner of baddies around the world, with furious prejudice. Dr. Petrovich, a leading Biopreparat scientist rescued by Mullins ten years ago, has discovered a viral agent linked to his Biopreparat days. Morton explains:

"There is a crisis scenario coming about as the technology to map the human genome has been completed and has gotten into the wrong hands. The player has to stop them from creating an actual-mapped, genetic-specific weapon or target - something created to specifically target only one genetic code (or person)."

This is why Mullins must step out and break some fingers (hah!) once again. He will

travel across the globe to prevent the release of a deadly biological plague, from the Middle East to Asia to Europe to Russia. Some of these hotspots include: Terrorist strongholds in Colombia, a massive ocean liner en route to Tampa Bay, a Hong Kong prison, a desert in Jordan where you must face waves of terrorists and a top secret underground complex in Kamchatka. A bonus is the inclusion of a flashback mission set in Soviet-era Prague.

Ghoulish detail

The original Soldier of Fortune used the Quake II engine with Raven's proprietary Ghoul technology, that most notably allowed locational damage across the body. The sequel uses the Quake III Team Arena engine and improved Ghoul II. The Q3TA engine allows some of the most amazing graphics yet seen in firstperson shooters,

including shader effects and curved surfaces, pushed to the limit.

"The level of model detail in this game is going to be pretty impressive," says Morton. "One of my personal gripes with the Quake III engine has been that the models have

you have to fax your driver's license to prove that you're over the age of 17

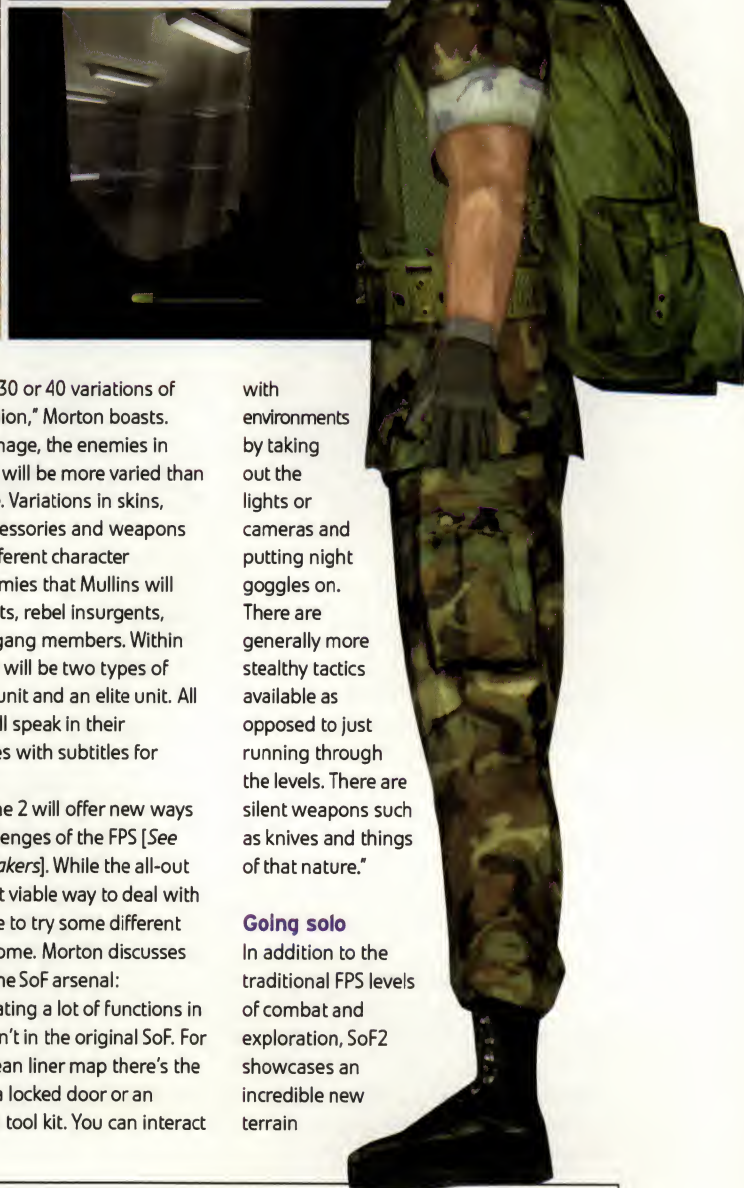
suffered by comparison to the environments. In SOF2 that's not the case. Most of the models are going to come close to 2500-3000 polygons - there are almost 1500 polygons for the in-game weapon. Raven took highly detailed photographs of actual full-working weapons that you will be using through the game and digitized them down and used them for the texturing of the models.

KEEP ME MOVING



Players will be able to ride in fast attack vehicles (FAV), like trucks and helicopters. Taking a note from the classic *Half-Life*, heavy machinery will be operational and necessary for some missions. Fixed weapons emplacements can also be used against unfortunate enemies. These levels will feature the ROAM Terrain System which promises fast action levels with huge sprawling environments.

Perhaps keen to skirt early controversy, Raven hasn't released any explicit images



"The textures are some of the best that I've ever seen, and the texture depth will probably be staying at 1024x768. It's being coded specifically for the GeForce nV20 chipset - for its highest level of detail. Although we're not trying to scare away lower-end card owners."

players will ride on the back of an armoured truck or take to the skies in a helicopter

Ghoul II technology has seen an increased number of damage areas as well as pure digital representations of faces and graphic wrappings around faces, the latter allowing different facial expressions to be produced in-game in realtime. Ghoul II also introduces advanced model lighting, skeletal model system, specular lighting, damage decals, multiple skins on enemy varieties, advanced frame compression, bolting of accessories and ultra-realistic animation. "It uses bolt-on particle technology to handle the blood, scars, intestines and bone fragments, in a way that allows for a lot of variation within the different 'gore zones'.

There are probably 30 or 40 variations of damage in each region," Morton boasts.

Speaking of damage, the enemies in *Soldier of Fortune 2* will be more varied than in any game to date. Variations in skins, models, bolt-on accessories and weapons create dozens of different character configurations. Enemies that Mullins will face include terrorists, rebel insurgents, guards, thugs and gang members. Within each location, there will be two types of enemies, a normal unit and an elite unit. All game characters will speak in their respective languages with subtitles for translation.

Soldier of Fortune 2 will offer new ways of meeting the challenges of the FPS [See *Flesh Plastered Sneakers*]. While the all-out assault is still a most viable way to deal with enemies, the chance to try some different tactics is most welcome. Morton discusses these additions to the *SoF* arsenal:

"We're incorporating a lot of functions in the game that weren't in the original *SoF*. For example, on the ocean liner map there's the ability to deal with a locked door or an electrical box with a tool kit. You can interact

with environments by taking out the lights or cameras and putting night goggles on. There are generally more stealthy tactics available as opposed to just running through the levels. There are silent weapons such as knives and things of that nature."

Going solo

In addition to the traditional FPS levels of combat and exploration, *SoF2* showcases an incredible new terrain

It's quiet... maybe too quiet...

IN CASE IT'S SUNDAY

"A mature game... it's very realistic" Matt Morton. **mature** (Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary, 3rd Edn): adj. *With fully developed powers of body and mind; sensible, wise; duly careful and adequate.*

Allow a moment for some thoughts on what makes a game 'mature'. Violent action games have always been some of the finest fare on the PC but they are, in essence, simple harmless escapism. The problem with the graphically 'real' nature of ultra-violent games (such as SOF 2) is that the gamer is placed in a 'realistic' situation without any realistic context.

The weapons are realistic, the exit wounds are realistic but you can still run around collecting health boxes, even though your enemies have died somewhat realistic, entirely horrific deaths. Is maturity when you can't tell that it's a game anymore? There is no good moral context for titles that place such high fantasy in a 'real world' context. Just because a game is only suitable for adults doesn't make it mature.

Praise to Raven for implementing the latest technology into SOF 2 and some kind of security to protect the younger gamers. In this sense the game development is mature. The fact that cutting edge technology makes a game immediate and "new" doesn't mean the content is valuable or even worthwhile. At best, Soldier of Fortune 2 is extreme escapism for a special, older audience. At worst it's an overtly pro-violent game that blurs the line between reality and fiction. Buyer beware.



engine called the ROAM terrain system. Players will be able to ride on the back of an armoured truck and take aim at a pursuing force, or take to the skies in a helicopter. Morton is enthusiastic about the potential this vast terrain offers to the level design:

"Random terrain generation is one of the more exciting elements of the new technology. One of the E3 levels will be set in the door of a helicopter with an M60 on a sling. You will be flying over a terrain map that's pretty much rendering in realtime and it's only going to be referencing a bitmap for its textures. This will be similar to the train mission from SoF but without the looping terrain. They will be certain events - set points of scripting such as taking out guys that appear on a bridge, for example - but the in-game playable map will be equivalent to 2.5 miles x 2.5 miles without any loading needed. It's like taking the terrain aspects of Quake III Team Arena and kicking the doors right off."

The Icarus scripting language, first used in Star Trek: Voyager Elite Force has given

Raven the ability to flesh out the gameworld with more impressive visual effects and greater interactivity within the game. This will help to create a more focussed narrative throughout SoF2 and create a more immersive experience.

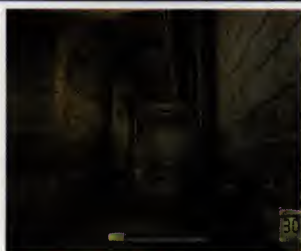
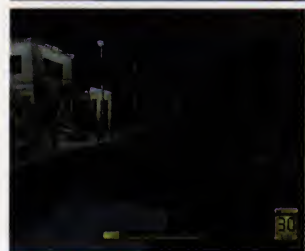
The controversial nature of Soldier of Fortune 2's content has meant that multiplayer has been notably absent from its feature list. Morton said: "There is no multiplayer aspect to SoF2. There is talk - we've heard a lot of people complain about that but we've also had support for why we're not doing it. I guess in its place we've got the random mission generator. You'll go into a scenario and click a button and it'll randomly create a map, scenario and objective and completion point - that was a pretty big brick to try and wrap our brains around. I mean, 'how are

we going to test it?' was the obvious question, 'how are we gonna QA it?' But we're actually looking at a way now to save the randomly generated map and email to other people or share it out in the community."

Morton promised more from Raven's premiere title: "This build is just a month and a half old. The demo levels only have the first pass done on them - very early but everything should be in place at E3, where there will be three kiosks running the game."

By the time you read this, we will have already checked out that new build at E3. Stay tuned next month for further details.

A very modern, organic design ethos at work



OZ DEVELOPER PROFILE #1: KROME STUDIOS

IN OUR SECOND PART OF THIS SERIES ON AUSTRALIAN PC GAMES DEVELOPERS, TIMOTHY C. BEST COMES IN OFF THE DUSTY CENTRAL SLOPES AND PLAINS, DONS THE BOARDIES AND A MUSCLE T, AND SPEAKS TO ACE SURFING-SIM DEVELOPERS KROME STUDIOS ABOUT LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF THE PERFECT WAVE

The story of Krome is an interesting one and a good one to start the Australian developers profiles. It's a story of a few friends whose motto was "games funs!" and whose golden rule was never to make a game just to make money, going on to co-found one of the largest games studios in the country.

It can happen. Krome is also a good place to start because it used an Aussie strength to its advantage. The Yanks might think we ride Kangaroos to school but they also know we have surf.

Let's start our tale somewhere near the beginning and see how you go from wide-eyed developers exclaiming Gee Whiz! to being surrounded by a hot, hip, development house with all the fittings and shiny Krome...

A TALE OF TWO GAME CO'S

With a heading like that there could only be one place to start: Dickens. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..."

Ambivalence like that is hard to come by but you can sense it in John Passfield's voice. Passfield is the Director of Development and one of the founders of Krome Studios. You might not have heard much of Krome Studios, beyond them releasing Championship Surfer, but that's only because it's sneaking up on people.

Being located near Brisbane and employing more than 50 people, Krome is not only one of the fastest growing and largest developers in Queensland but in all

of Australia.

That being the case, why would there be a note of ambivalence in Passfield's voice? Well to work that out you'd have to take another step back and look at where Krome came from.

Before November 1999 there was GeeWhiz! Interactive consisting of the team of Passfield, Steve Stamatiadis and Tony Ball and there was Pacific Interactive Entertainment headed up by Robert Walsh.

Walsh had the surfing contacts, know-how and financing nous from time spent as a Financial Controller with Morrison Media, a group that controlled surfing mags including Surfing Life. Gee Whiz! had the programming firepower. Together they had a team capable of putting together a world-class surf-spray game: Mike Stewart's Pro Bodyboarding.

They realised if they kept working together they had a team capable of a lot more than just that.

"Gee Whiz! Entertainment had valuable experience in designing and making games, but had a lack of business experience," explains Passfield.

"Robert Walsh had great business sense and valuable experience in the publishing/distribution side of game development. Together both sides complemented each other perfectly."

Just developing the actual game of Mike Stewart's Pro Bodyboarding for the PC had proved to be a job that required more people than just the three-man team of Gee Whiz!

Company Motto: "If you're not having fun, you're not doing it right"

Location: Fortitude Valley, Queensland

Founded: 1st November, 1999

URL: www.kromestudios.com

Krome Identities: CEO: Robert Walsh; Director of Development: John Passfield; Creative Director: Steve Stamatiadis

Best Development Advice Given to You: "If we'd listened to all the advice we've been given over the years we would have given up a long time ago"

Accomplices: Current publishers are Havas Interactive, Ubisoft and Disney Interactive

Pie Graph: FUN=33%, BUSINESS=33% and TECHNOLOGY=33%



This caused them to turn to their pool of long-time associates, such as Robert Crane (of Mind Mechanics) to help out.

Once Mike Stewart's was out and met a warm reception, the group of Walsh, Passfield and Stamatiadis - who would later found Krome - decided that it was time to take the next step. Getting publishers in Australia can be hard but with our country's reputation on the world surfing stage, a surfing game from Australia should have no

One of the dudes from Krome catching a gnarly wave



More gnarly waves, more gnarly Krome dudes



problems. With Walsh's contacts another surfing title made sense. With the brilliant water mechanics from Mike Steward's Bodyboarding and a sport with a higher profile like surfing it made sense to really go for it.

SIZE MATTERS

They decided to develop Championship Surfer across multiple platforms (PC, in five languages, Dreamcast and PlayStation) and that was one wave a small team just couldn't catch. With the art requirements and detail

required of world-class games now, especially for console development, and much more so for next generation console development, expansion was on the cards.

Passfield outlines the advantages of growing in size as: "gaining publisher respect, being able to do multiple projects with multiple publishers (and minimising risk), leveraging technology across different projects and having an abundance of resources that can be used in game development.

"Plus, there's more people to play Counter-Strike with, we can actually have staff parties with more than three people and we have more people to laugh at falling off

surfboards."

It's with this growth one can hear the echo of "the best of times, worst of times" thing in Passfield. After seven years with a three-man team that could turn on a dime and could make far-out games that would make large companies shudder, Passfield must miss the days of a few good friends together doing their thing. Gee Whiz! is responsible for such games as zombie-fests Halloween Harry and Zombie Wars. They also worked with Penelope Keith (To the Manor Born) in the graphical adventure Flight of the Amazon Queen, involving six-foot tall pygmies, mad scientists and 40s starlets. Then there were the off-the-wall game-ish projects with surprising artificial life AI like the Spirit Board which answered your questions about life, love and the future and The Chronicles of Jaruu Tenk which created a little world than ran in the background of your PC as virtual pet and screensaver combo. Gee Whiz! was a mobile and madcap fella.

The size of Krome is a far cry from Gee Whiz!; naturally sacrifices have to be made for all the size and glory. The flipside to being able to tackle the big projects and being about to have decent office parties, Passfield lists as: "Increased burn rate, cash flow issues, you have to work a lot harder to keep the same fun environment, and it's much harder to keep the communication flowing."

POLISHED KROME

Although you can detect that touch of nostalgia for days of going "Gee Whiz!" it is also obvious that he's excited to be taking on

GEE WHIZ!

Gee Whiz! started out in 1992 as Interactive Binary Illusions. John Passfield was a programmer at Telstra and Steve Stamatidis was working as an animator. As Binary Illusions, they released Halloween Harry in 1993 which was Apogee's first VGA game and then Flight of the Amazon Queen in 1995.

Amazon Queen was especially impressive as it was Australia's first 'talking' graphic adventure featuring the vocal talents of Penelope Keith (To the Manor Born, The Good Life) and Bill Hootkins ("Porkins" from Star Wars, Raiders of the Lost Ark). In 1996 the name changed to Gee Whiz! when a friend exclaimed just that. It was fun. It stuck. Since then Gee Whiz! worked on a pilot for an animated series based on Zombie Wars, dabbled with a game called Mystery Club: Gruesome Castle which produced a cool demo and has released Zombie Wars, Spirit Board (version 1&2), The



Chronicles of Jaruu Tenk, and, of course, Mike Stewart's Pro Bodyboarding. Although Krome is too big and has too much talent in too many great developers just to be thought of as an expanded Gee Whiz!, somewhere, the heart of Gee Whiz's "games fun!" lives on.

the world with the backing of Krome.

Since the release of *Championship Surfer*, Krome has started development on several PC and PlayStation2 titles, something that a three-person team would have found blatantly impossible. *Kat Burglar* is the first of its next-gen titles after *Championship Surfer*, and currently Krome's only announced upcoming game. It is a thirdperson action/adventure set in the swinging 60s (or "time of *Austin Powers*" as a whole new generation are learning to think of it) and goes to show some of Krome's muscle using a soft-skinned skeletal animation system, animation blending, mesh morphing, realtime shadows rounded out with funky art direction.

While I was trying to put together this profile it was obvious that Passfield and Krome were on the move. He flew in from the Game Developer Conference in the US, he stopped off in Japan for a show there and then as soon as he returned there were the preparations for E3 to begin.

Being the product of such rapid growth and spinning from collaboration between two small (tiny, really) development teams in P.I.E. and *Gee Whiz!* you'd think Krome would be a little different to most big companies, if only because they were so green and maybe a little naive.

"Having just come back from the Game Developer Conference I think we've got a lot in common with a lot of other game developers," Passfield says.

"Maybe one unique feature of Krome is that apart from our accounts person every single person is involved in making games

Australia and around the world, who worked on such titles as 8 and 16-bit *Shinobi*, *Ninja Warriors*, *Double Dragon 1* and *2*, *Golden Axe* as well as *Cannon Fodder*, *Dark Reign* and *TOCA Touring Cars 2*, inexperience is hardly a problem.

LESSONS FROM THE LITTLE GUY

Even with veterans onboard, there are still a lot of holdovers to Passfield's virtual garage-developer beginnings, besides just getting everyone involved. If you don't get the most out of all of your resources as a small and independent team, you don't tend to last long. This has lead to Passfield learning some great industry practices. Having everyone involved is one.

Another lesson from his early days "was to spend what little money we had on making the games. Now that we have larger budgets and larger teams we're still focused on the end product and still focused on making great games."

That includes taking a slightly longer-term approach to developing, even if it costs in the short term.

"It's very important to re-use technology as well as constantly update it," he says.

"We make sure that a lot of code is common across all our console engines. Another key feature is that we make sure we use our R&D technology in our games."

Many companies make a note of trying to do this but find it incredibly difficult as solutions are usually needed so quickly that one-off solutions are developed instead of more widely-applicable solutions. The development and continual use of Krome's

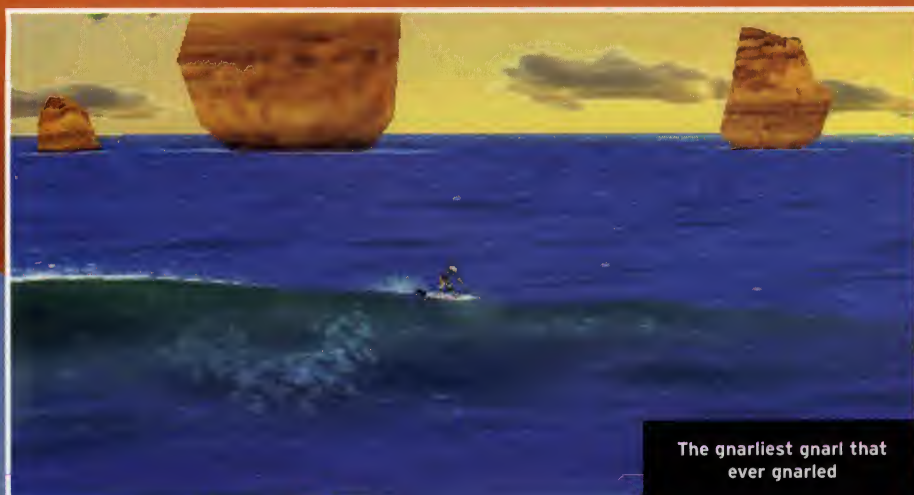
APART FROM OUR ACCOUNTS PERSON EVERY SINGLE PERSON AT KROME IS INVOLVED IN MAKING GAMES

on a day-to-day basis."

It is obvious that building a large studio around the core of a small and independent team has actually proved to be a definite strength of Krome. With a team drawn from developers and several veterans from across

Merkury 3D graphics engine is a shining example of Krome actually managing to evolve and re-use its technology.

Merkury has been used since the *Gee Whiz!* days for games like *Jaruu Tenk*, and has evolved through Mike Stewart's Pro



The gnarliest gnarl that ever gnarled

WORDS TO THE WISE: SHOW ME MORE THAN MECHS AND ELVES

JOHN PASSFIELD ON STARTING OUT:



THE KROME TEAM

If you're a start up company you need to do three things: hire a business guy who knows what he's doing, hire a producer with some experience and get a team of people who love making games. If you're a programmer, create some simple game demos. They don't have to be very complicated but need to show that you can actually see something through from start to finish.

If you're an artist, create some sample low poly models (around 2,000 polygons for PS2). Please make sure that you have more than *Giant Mechs and Elves* in your portfolio (these are nice, but variety impresses!)

For production, apply for a testing position at your local games company. It may seem like a lowly position, but all of our production assistants started out in QA.

As Steve our Creative Director says, "Find something you like doing and be the best you can possibly be at it."

Bodyboarding and on to the stage where it is being used in *Kat Burglar* and one suspects it'll turn up in the other three PC/next-gen titles they are working on.

THE WALSH FACTOR

It's interesting to note that what brought about Krome was Mike Stewart's Pro Bodyboarding and then Krome's first title was *Championship Surfer*. It's interesting because *Gee Whiz!* always seemed to be about making off-the-wall games from pure schlock fun to odd little computer people you could talk to running in the background and that the surfing titles seem a little... on the wall.

One suspects that that's the financial, and business smarts wielding, Walsh factor coming into play. Not that either game was purely a money making matter; no one who saw the love put into modelling the waves so they break unpredictably but realistically would say that.

One does get the sense that beyond the surfing titles (and especially in the funky, mine-filled, shark-dodging, power-up infested arcade mode of *Championship Surfer*), you can see the *Gee Whiz!* creeping through the metal everywhere at Krome, from *Kat Burglar* to the Merkury engine itself and even the rounded, playful, website design.

Personally, I can't wait to see what the makers of side scroller space-zombie games, virtual ouija boards, *Scooby Doo*-esque adventures and *Jaruu Tenk* do with one of the largest studios in Australia and the motto: "If you're not having fun, you're not doing it right."



CRATE MOMENTS IN GAMING



THEY'RE EVERYWHERE. INFESTING EVERY GENRE OF GAME, EVERY PLATFORM, EVERY SYSTEM. WITHOUT US REALISING IT, THE CRATES HAVE CONQUERED THE EARTH, AND IT SEEMS THE DAY WILL SOON COME WHEN VIDEO GAMES WILL CONSIST OF NOTHING ELSE. JOIN OUR RESIDENT HEXAHEDRAL SPECIALIST **JAMES COTTEE** AS WE LOOK AT THE SINGLE BIGGEST TREND IN MODERN GAME DESIGN: THE IRRESISTIBLE LURE OF THE CRATE.

Crates have been around for a long time. While they have shown many practical uses for storing and shipping goods in the real world, they have not traditionally been associated with entertainment. While the odd public speaker may have stood on soap boxes to be heard, and the Mardi Gras is best observed from atop a

plastic milk crate, conventional mediums have never seen the crate itself as a crowd pleaser. Indeed, experiments to this end may explain the origin of the term "wooden acting".

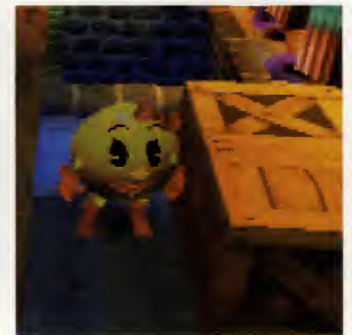
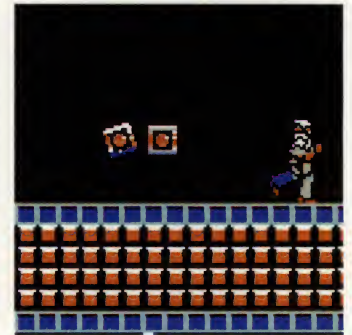
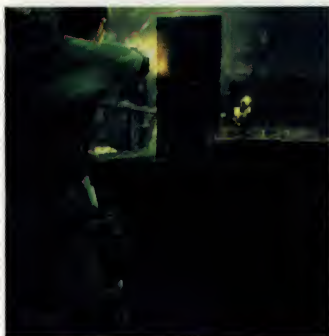
But the past few decades have changed all the rules. Digital technology has made the video game possible, and within game worlds of limitless

imagination the crate has found its true calling. Not as a petty slave to commerce, but as a valid entertainer in its own right. Today's crate has many faces: cornucopia, conundrum, stepping stone to glory.

Granted, the uptake of the crate was slow at first, but this was only a sign of the immature nature of the video game. The revolutionary space combat

game *Elite* was one of the first, showing that if a space ship was destroyed the precious crates within would be released. The bigger the ship, the more crates. Sid Meier littered the game maps in *Civilization* with "villages," but the fact they were square and had goodies inside left nothing to the imagination. Through the 90s the rise of the crate was exponential, permeating every

Through the 90s the rise of the crate was exponential, permeating every title on the market, leaving no doubt that the history of gaming is the history of crates.



title on the market, leaving no doubt that the history of gaming is the history of crates.

Crates are great

Just what is a crate? At its simplest, it is just a cube, six square polygons joined at the seams. It can be wood, or cardboard, or steel, or stone. Colour can hint at its makeup, but more often elaborate bitmaps are pasted on their sides to make them look more authentic. Rectangular prisms can also make fine crates, whether tall and thin or short and flat. They can be adorned with symbols or stenciled lettering to hint at their purpose, or remain blank, ciphers of the gaming world.

Other, more elaborate shapes may

confuse the untrained eye at first, but then it goes without saying that for crates, form follows function. Barrels are a common subset, and to stretch the definition, fire extinguishers are as well. Triangular, pentagonal, even hexagonal prisms can be crates these days. Also, more and more crates now come with extra bells and whistles, like beveled or curved edges. Some even accurately model the wooden cross braces across their sides, leaving shallow yet distinct triangular troughs. With bump mapping will soon come the promise of crates modeled right down to the splinter.

Crates can exist all by their lonesome, but more often they'll be seen in groups. Perhaps a large

mother crate will be protecting small baby crates. Or a herd of fit young crates will be on the back of a truck, ready to be shipped to market. Some games even provide the rarest treats of all; entire rooms full of crates. Like a child at the zoo, one can't help being mesmerised by crates of every shape and size, all under the one roof.

The Crate Escape

Crates serve many purposes in games today. The one that most readily comes to mind is the crate as provider, a beacon of safety in a hostile environment. When smashed open, and sometimes merely when touched, these crates can provide the player with health, ammunition, food,

new weapons, vital equipment, new lives, and sometimes even clues to unraveling the mystery of the game. Crates need not bear the symbol of the red cross to be a symbol of hope and love.

Crates can also prove to be obstacles to completing a level. Sometimes crates will be arranged in such a way as to require the player to jump over them precisely, as a test of skill and patience. Sometimes the crates will have to be pushed into position before this climbing and jumping can commence. And sometimes the necessity of stacking crates complicates this even further. Thus crates can also stimulate the mind, bringing knowledge as well as the promise of limitless bounty.



CRATES ON CONSOLES

Because video game consoles generally have less RAM, CPU power and storage space than PCs, their games have to be more simple in nature, and thus even more crate reliant. Mario players have known for years that headbutting crates is a great way to obtain magic mushrooms and other goodies. Crash Bandicoot

spends his entire life smashing crates open for the Wumpa fruit within. Indeed, in the PSX game Team Buddies, not only do you spend the entire game stacking crates, the pattern you arrange them in determines what they contain. It's true to say that you only get out of crates what you put into them.



In some games, the crate itself can be used as a weapon to smite foes. Whether dropped, or thrown, or pushed, the crate reveals itself as powerful in its own right. By the same token, it's an unwise player who dares to challenge the authority of the crate. Some explode when their perfect geometric sanctity is violated, serving as a warning to all and sundry that crates are not to be taken lightly.

Yes, crates have many uses. Though in some cases, it may seem that a crate has been deployed with no discernable use at all. Perhaps a game engine will support the smashing of crates, but the game design has placed nothing inside them. Or perhaps the crates will be indestructible, yet jumping on them

leads nowhere, or jumping itself is impossible in the game. What then? The answer is obvious; the crates are there for their own sake. Whether it's to lend authenticity to an industrial setting, to balance the Feng Shui of a room, or just for decoration, a crate or two never goes astray. After all, in today's video games we've come to expect them.

Crate Balls of Fire

So crates are now a part of our everyday gaming lives. Why is it so? How did it all get started? What motivation did programmers have in the first place to include them? The most obvious reason is pacing. In everyday life, one almost never gets attacked (Redfern residents

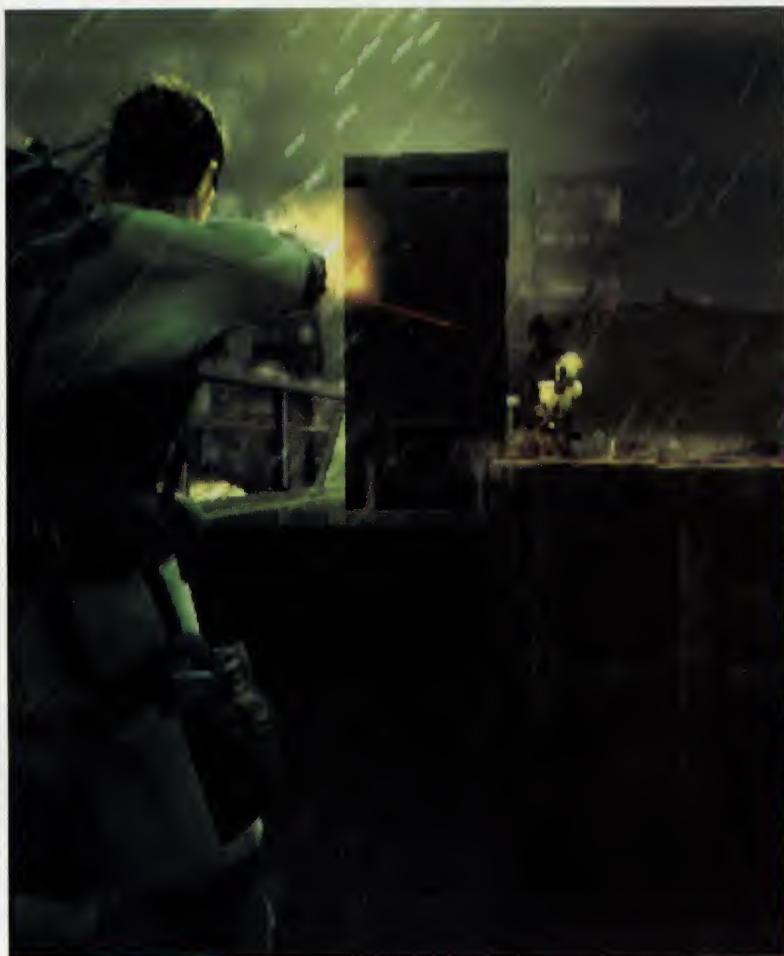
notwithstanding) and healing up from bodily harm can take weeks or months. In an effort to be more exciting than real life, video games throw thousands of hostile enemies in the player's direction. Each has the ability to maim or kill the in-game character, and not getting scratched in the course of a game is usually high on impossible.

Thus the invention of the power-up. These serve to top up health as one progresses, and to incrementally increase one's firepower as the enemies become more difficult to destroy. While it's all well and good to have smart bombs just drifting around on screen in a 2D shooter waiting to be picked up, more realistic looking games, particularly firstperson

shooters, demand something that makes a little more sense. Hence the innovation of storing these bonuses in crates. It may not be an accurate representation of the role crates play in the real world, but today's interactive bloodbaths are hardly that realistic to start with.

Crates are also used to break up the gameplay, to add variety to games spawned of genre. It's quite common for levels to offer, say, an exacting puzzle involving jumping between crates suspended over lava, as a welcome break from mindless action. Or perhaps the bonus desired will be in only one of a number of available crates, leading the player on a jolly lucky dip to get what they want.

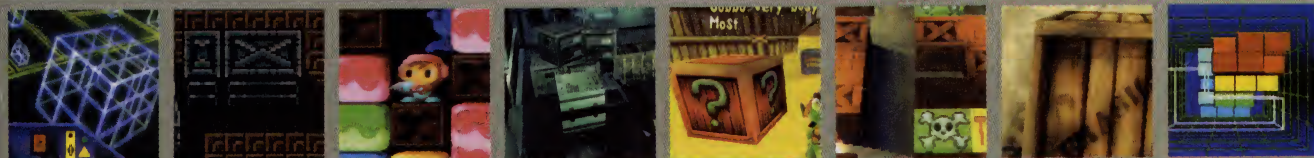
But the meta-reason behind all of



ONLINE

For those of you who would like to learn more about crates, there are many online resources available. Perhaps the single greatest is www.oldmanmurray.com, and their Seconds-to-Crate system, an empirical method of objectively measuring a game's worth based on the time it takes to reach the first crate.

Also of moderate interest, www.somethingawful.com published an excellent article on the all time top ten rooms full of crates in video games, essential reading for the crate enthusiast. The winner? A Quake II MOD that converted every single thing in the game into crates, including the actual players.



these uses is that crates have now become an entrenched part of the visual language of video games, as immovable and irreplaceable as a letter of the alphabet. If a hallway is blocked by crates, you instinctively know that the game world doesn't exist beyond them. If crates can be the coin of in-game currency, they can also be a sign of creative bankruptcy in game designers. As hard as it is to believe, many people today are sick and tired of crates.

Crate Expectations

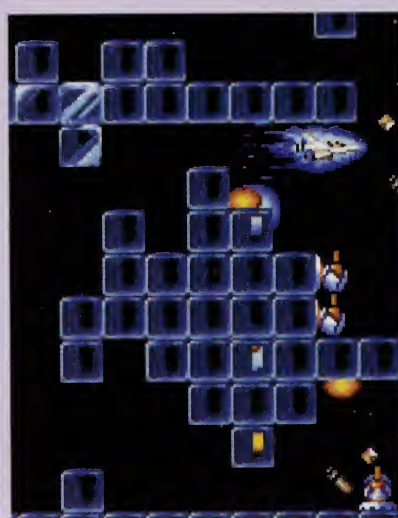
Love 'em or hate 'em, crates are a part of life. Just as they prop up furniture in many a swinging bachelor pad, they also prop up many tired gaming genres. But when one looks at the vast benefits we've received from

crates, and the amazing technical advances they mirror, one realises that crates are our friends, and without them we'd be so much the poorer. As we stride forth into an uncertain future, it's comforting to know that some square, emotionless things never change.

Perhaps the greatest exponent of the crate in modern gaming is the protagonist of the Metal Gear series, Solid Snake. Sure, he hides behind large crates, picks up small ones for ammo, and smashes medium sized crates for the hell of it. But he can also put a cardboard box over his head, crouch down, and attempt to become a crate himself. It points to an eternal truth of which we should all take heed. To be at one with the crate is to be at one with oneself.

VOXELS: THE MISSING LINK?

Games like Tiberian Sun and Red Alert 2 don't use pixels or polygons to render their game environments, they use voxels. These picture elements exist in three dimensions, and can be easily imagined as little coloured cubes, or crates. It could be argued that if you enlarge any game image enough you'll see that everything is made up of millions of tiny crates, albeit viewed from side on. Forget quarks and bozons, perhaps this is the clue that quantum physicists have been overlooking. That all matter in the universe, if you look hard enough, is really made of crates.



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IN REVIEW

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GAMES



Landmarks are big in this industry, considering gaming as we know it is not even 50 yrs old yet. One of the bigger landmarks in the brief history of our time is Myst. The latest sequel in the biggest selling franchise in gaming history, with an estimated ten million units moved worldwide, is important news. But haven't times changed? Since the revolutionary CD technology of Myst, technology has changed our lives. A good proportion of the first world is communicating via their PCs every night and PCs are no longer a niche hobby but an integral link in our lives.

Wiping away the nostalgia from my eyes, I can't help but realise that our industry is still among the more naïve. Sure, games are everywhere but the quality of subject matter is generally pretty low. Technology continues to break ground but we're still shooting zombies and saving Earth. There will always be a place for these games but what about some serious art for our PCs? We move ever closer to cinema and literature but as ever, it is a slow move.

Speaking of movies, we were going to review Evil Dead this issue, but it was terrible... and that's all I'll about this film conversion. In other comedy news, Anthony is live at the impro on p 83 with a soft target for once and nobody gets out alive. One of the biggest selling games in Europe right now, Cossacks, is reviewed on p78, so bring your war helmet and don't forget to write to us with your review comments. Or better yet, go to our forums, where we've culled the troublemakers and left only the most erudite readers to form community. You know where the love is...

johnd@next.com.au



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THE PCPP REVIEW SCORING SYSTEM

90+	Gold Award. A classic, everyone will love this game.
89-80	A strong title that's hard to fault. But perhaps not the best in its field.
79-60	Competent and playable. For fans of the genre.
59-40	Decidedly average, probably boring.
39-0	A dog. Bad, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible. Avoid.
Need	The minimum requirements to get the game running at a playable speed.
Want	The ideal system requirements for the game.
For	The major reasons why you'll like the reviewed game.
Against	The major reasons why you won't.

GAME OF THE MONTH COMPETITION!

Microsoft



Microsoft wants you to play Worms World Party the way it was meant to be played. As such, we have been supplied with one IntelliMouse Optical to give away. Just answer this question for your chance to win!

WHO WAS THE LEAD SINGER OF THE 80S FOLK POP GROUP WORLD PARTY?

Write your answer on the back of an envelope, addressed to: **Microsoft Game of the Month, PC PowerPlay, 78 Renwick Street, Redfern NSW 2016**

MYST 3 EXILE

The perfect place to go mad with frustration

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Presto

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DISTRIBUTOR
Ubisoft

PRICE
\$89.95

RATING
M

NEED
PII-233
64Mb RAM
200Mb HDD
8Mb Videocard

WANT
Duron 700
64Mb RAM
2.1Gb HDD
16Mb Videocard
Direct3D
4 Channel Speakers

MULTIPLAYER
No

AVAILABLE
Now

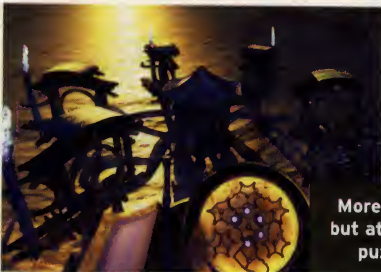
ONLINE

www.puzzle.com
Do you need affordable solutions for LANs and other networking tech? Then this is the very site for you!

www.narayan.com
The homepage of the Narayan family! Unfortunately it hasn't been updated since December 1999, so we'll never know if their millennium party was a success.



It was a dark and stormy night...



More obtuse but attractive puzzles



T here comes a time in every gamer's life when he or she finds themselves sick of fast-paced all-action 3D blastathons, and instead needs time for quiet reflection, cerebral stimulation and tiny little singing rats. *Myst3 Exile*, the latest in a proud tradition of deeply pacified puzzle adventures, amply fulfils all these exacting needs, even - and especially - the singing rat.

100MHz barrier. The game was fairly heavily criticised by a press brought up on a diet of Duke Nukem and Doom, because it was - all said and done - a series of attractive picture-postcards occasionally broken up by sections of Quicktime video. However, at the time it was not only the best looking game, but also the best looking thing that could be displayed on a fairly low-end PC.

The sequel, *Riven*, was even more of a visual accomplishment, but once again existed as a series of static images atop which would play Quicktime videos to simulate movement of various doors, levers and other puzzle elements.

Despite this, the *Myst* series has been embraced and even worshipped by fans, and also enjoyed a following outside the traditional hard core gamer demographic. At last count, *Myst* and *Riven* had sold more than 10 million copies; serious money in anyone's book.

Which is why Ubisoft issued a challenge to the great development houses of the US of A; create a sequel to *Myst* and *Riven* that will sell by the bushel. Several companies offered proposals, but it was Presto Studios - late of the Journeyman Project - who won the franchise and produced the game we've reviewed here today.

PC PowerPlay spoke with Presto at Sydney's exclusive Renaissance Hotel at Circular Quay on a wet weekday in late May, and from this interview we learnt that Presto has attempted to combine what was great about *Myst* with what was great about *Riven*.

To this end we have a sort of hybrid of the two games, which we can look at as either combining the elegant simplicity of *Myst* with the rich and immersive world of *Riven*, or as combining the gawky first-title failings of *Myst* with the obtuse and frustrating puzzles of *Riven*.

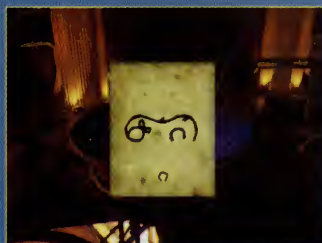
we have a sort of hybrid of the two games, combining the elegance of *Myst* with the rich world of *Riven*

The original *Myst* was released way back in the days when CD-ROM was new technology and PCs had yet to break the



MANIPULATE THIS!

The original *Myst* had quite a few objects that had to be used on certain puzzles, and the ultra lean interface made them a little clumsy and ugly to use. *Riven* solved this by having hardly any objects; everything was done with the player's hand. *Myst3* walks a line between the two, keeping manipulable objects to a minimum, but integrating them into the game world more effectively. Here, the player is about to place a special symbol written on a loose journal page into an imaging device to unlock the key to Saavedro's home world of Narayan.



The Angle of Eternity

Myst3 takes place with the player yet again being given a journal in the opening moments of the game by a man named Atrus, who possesses the ability - or art - of writing new worlds, called Ages. Travel between the Ages is achieved by using linking books. Having just resurrected his lost civilisation, the D'Ni, Atrus has written a new Age in which everyone is going to go off and live happily ever after.

Unfortunately, the player is there to witness a mysterious stranger break into Atrus' home and steal the new Age's linking book and then link out to another Age. Without a moment's thought, the player follows, and another grand adventure begins.

One thing Presto was keen to stress was what they most liked about the first two games - which were developed by Cyan - was that the player character had no identity, it was really you in the game, not some stranger into whose shoes you were suddenly thrust. So there is no indication of who you are or where you're going, just that

you're suddenly chasing this rather rank individual who has stolen Atrus' book.

You find yourself in a very small age called J'nanin, which Atrus wrote as a sort of lesson Age for his two sons Siris and Achenar, who were the bad guys from *Myst*. The villain of *Myst3*, who is named Saavedro, has taken possession of this and other lesson ages and warped the puzzles therein to make things even more difficult for his arch-enemy Atrus.

That's right; not only will you have to divine obscure puzzles, you'll also have to figure out why they don't work properly and then determine how Saavedro's meddlings have made them even more obscure and difficult.

Saavedro's motivation is to first torture Atrus by making him take his own lesson (Atrus wrote all the lesson Ages, recall) and then lure him to yet another Age called Narayan, destroyed by Siris and Achenar.

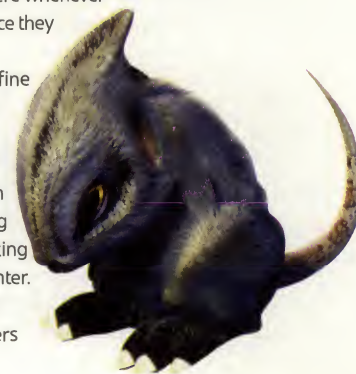
Confused? It gets worse. Each of the lesson Ages - there are three plus J'nanin - has a certain theme, be it energy, dynamic forces or nature, and the puzzles reflect this theme. The aim of each Age is simple; move

through the Age until you reach a linking book back to J'nanin, and another piece of the lock to Narayan is revealed.

I'm a People Person!

The immediate narrative difference between *Myst3* and the earlier games is that there are actually real people in the worlds with you. Okay, there's one real person, namely Saavedro, but there is a great deal more character-on-character action. This does help to create a much more lively world rather than the clinical abstraction of *Myst* or the lonely wastes of *Riven*, where whenever you saw a person in the distance they would run away.

Unfortunately though, the fine actor who plays Saavedro, and on whom the narrative must necessarily live or die, chews carpet worse than Nick Nolte in *The Thin Red Line*. We're talking overly dramatic pauses, smacking of lips and evil wheezing laughter. We're talking glaring eyes and crocodile tears as he remembers his fallen brethren.





However, the FMV acting is far superior to much of what we have thus far experienced on the PC, and is certainly streets ahead of similar fare from Westwood.

It is the character of Saavedro who drives you through the story, and they are his puzzles which you must defeat. The original *Myst* took place in a series of small self-contained worlds which were very abstract,

try to avoid 'Myst shock', where you stand pulling a metal lever for hours because your mind has melted

so the puzzles seemed natural in their weirdness and obscurity. *Riven* on the other hand was a very detailed world which had been realised literally to the nth degree. Every puzzle in *Riven* had an actual practical function in the world of *Riven*, and many of the puzzles involved figuring out how to work certain machines.

Sadly, *Myst3* returns to the abstract puzzling-for-puzzles-sake of *Myst*. The

puzzles are very obvious and clearly exist to hinder the player, and have no real function in the world. In fact, each Age seems to exist to serve its puzzles, rather than the other way around. Fortunately, these are supposed to be lesson Ages, so it is natural that they be built with puzzling in mind.

And indeed, the puzzles are certainly much more player-friendly to the shellshocked survivors who blew \$90 on *Riven* and then found themselves unable to solve a single thing. It was the explicit wish of Presto to avoid 'Myst shock' - where a player stands pulling a metal lever back and forth for hours on end because, quite simply, their mind has melted.

Each puzzle is self contained - you won't have to pull a lever then travel across half the map to find out what it did. The most expansive puzzle was a series of reflecting towers that bounced light back and forth across an island, and the entirety of the puzzle could always be seen from any point on the island. All the clues are delivered to the player in at most three adjoining locations, and it is up to you to put them together.

This doesn't mean the puzzles are

simplicitic though; a fair degree (and occasionally an extreme degree) of lateral thinking is required. If there is a recurring theme to the puzzles in *Myst3* it is to always remember that the obvious way to solve the puzzle is nearly always the wrong way to solve it, and to in fact beat a problem you will need to use the puzzle against itself.

The best example of this (and yes, skip this paragraph if you hate even little spoilers) is when it becomes necessary for the second time to enlist the services of one of the little singing rats. A singing rat trap is thoughtfully provided, and it is simplicity itself to knock a piece of fruit into the trap and then trap the singing rat. Unfortunately a trapped singing rat is no good to you; you need a free singing rat that is nevertheless unable to get back to its nest. So the solution is to use the trap not as a snare, but as a block in front of the singing rat's den. See, lateral thinking.

Windmills of your mind

Myst3's biggest technical innovation is the inclusion of an omni-directional viewpoint. While *Myst* and *Riven* were a series of picture postcards, *Myst3* is more



It's the outhouse
of the Gods,
dontcherknow



Here's another
of those
BLASTED books



with you in the perfect centre of the sphere. The view can be tilted and rotated in any direction, and while it's all done with smoke and mirrors, it gives a far greater sense of immersion than either of the first two games.

A few problems arise when it becomes quite easy to miss tiny objects that have been placed in the periphery of a scene; if you don't happen to rotate left at a certain point you will miss a pathway and wander up and

down becoming increasingly more frustrated.

However, the rotating view has been implemented with great skill. It's possible to rotate the view even while movies are playing; this is particularly effective in the opening scene of the game, where Atrus' wife Catherine begins speaking off screen, and it's necessary to rotate to bring her FMV overlay into view.

The art of *Myst3* is competent, but really

lacks the spectacular detail seen in *Riven*. In fact, for any individual static scene, *Riven* actually looks a lot better, and it was published four years ago. Everything in *Riven* really looked as if it was part of the world, whereas in *Myst3*, many objects and buildings appear somewhat inserted into the landscape. This is mainly due to Presto simply not having the time to make thousands of niggly texture refinements as Cyan was able during *Riven*'s extensive development.

SPIN THE DIAL AND FLIP THE SWITCH

While the viewpoint is mostly a rotatable view on a rich and imaginative world, occasionally the player is brought back to earth, as it were, by a puzzle console. At the console, the player manipulates various controls in order to, well, solve a puzzle. The puzzle consoles really break the immersive feeling of the game world, since they often trigger short animations which seem to be impossible to skip. And the fifteenth time you wait three seconds for a door to swing open will have you climbing the walls, guaranteed.



Have you Myst me?

Myst3 is an excellent addition to the *Myst* universe, but perhaps a little too easy for hard core fans of the original two games. The puzzles are more logical and more self contained, the world is more richly populated with real people, the rotatable viewpoint improves immersion, and the game has a very strong narrative structure. However it doesn't quite look as good as *Riven*, and the puzzles are still famously difficult for folks who just want to potter about in a fantasy world for a few hours. Check it out, but be prepared to go quite mad.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

FOR

- Rotating view
- Characters
- Logical puzzles

AGAINST

- Too hard for newbies
- Too easy for fans
- Slow pace

OVERALL

A worthy addition
to a classic
franchise

81%

DESPERADOS

A fine game for unforgiven young guns, be they good, bad or ugly

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Spellbound

PUBLISHER

Infogrames

DISTRIBUTOR

Ozisoft

PRICE

\$89.95

RATING

MA15+

NEED

PIII-233, 64MB RAM,
600MB HDD, 4MB
Videocard, Spurs

WANT

PIII-450, 128MB
RAM, 32MB
Videocard

MULTIPLAYER

No

AVAILABLE

Now

ONLINE

www.anipike.com

The best anime resource on the web: Here you can read all about Cowboy Bebop, the wild-west themed sci-fi series and best anime show ever!

www.dvdboxoffice.com

And here you can order your Region 1 DVDs of Cowboy Bebop! Six are now available! Buy now, or wait for the box set later this year!



T With newfangled 3D graphics steadily taking over every gaming genre on God's green Earth, one might assume that bitmap based top-down strategy games had given up the ghost completely, taking the long walk into the desert of abandonware and obsolescence. Not so, they've arrayed the proverbial wagons in a circle and are willing to go down fighting. Latest and greatest in this increasingly narrow field of human endeavour is *Desperados*: *Wanted Dead or Alive*, a tale of mighty cowboys and foreign devils set in the old west of the late 1800s.

Our story begins with bounty hunting iconoclast John Cooper taking up a bounty offered by a desperate railroad company operating near the Mexican border. It seems that a mysterious figure by the name of El



the opening sequence then the \$15,000 reward is as good as his.

Things aren't quite that simple, of course. A large number of cliched Western characters and situations stand between you and victory, including corrupt deputies, prostitutes, carnival strongmen, purveyors of all-purpose tonic, crooked plantation owners, various ethnic stereotypes, and all the shootin', rootin' and quick-loading you can handle.

Wiggy

In terms of play mechanics, *Desperados* takes its strongest cues from *Commandos*. Specialised characters heavily outnumbered in a hostile environment must use cunning and stealth to emerge triumphant. But the game also employs elements more

associated with graphical adventure games, such as Sam & Max. Triggering the right events will set off narrative sequences, clues that you're doing the right thing in the complex game setting.

Between the levels this means pre-rendered cutscenes, but during the mission they're of the less glamorous talking-head-in-a-text-window variety. Considering the time frame this is set in, it might have been more entertaining if they had aimed for the crudely animated jaw segment and eyes technique popularised in Monty Python. But then despite all the obvious absurdities you encounter in the course of play, this is one game that takes itself very seriously.

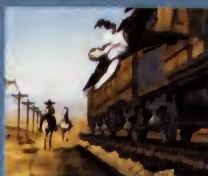
In some ways, such as the in-game music, this is a very good thing. The sound quality is excellent, highly evocative of the

the game also employs elements more associated with graphical adventure games

Diablo has organised the straggly bandit hordes into an elite terrorist force, waging a fierce guerilla war against anything towed by an iron horse. Cooper ain't afraid of no taco-eatin' grease balls, and if you believe

MOVIE LOGIC

While the game environment is hardly the most interactive ever devised, *Spellbound* has included just enough odds and ends to delude the player into thinking they're acting out a real live movie. For instance, why subdue a foe with boring old gunplay when you can drop a bale of hay on them? Why just mount your horse when you can jump out of a second story window onto it? Why just throw a vial of sleeping gas at someone when you can tie it to a balloon, wait for it to drift over them, then shoot it down? The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind...



barren, restless plains of the southwest. It also varies in intensity depending on whether the guards are on red, yellow or green alert, a technique first employed in *Dune II* and still effective today. All the music exists on your hard drive in MP3 format, so if you're feeling extra keen you can rip them, pull your sombrero over your walkman on the bus and imagine yourself as some kind of goddamned fruity cowpoke.

Wiggy Wiggy

The flipside to the serious nature of play, if you can call it that, is that each and every instant of game time exists on a knife-edge of tension. Since that's the whole point of this genre then it doesn't really count as a flaw. So while you're dying and reloading like a madman, you may not be cursing your apparently obsessive behaviour, but you'll certainly come up with some imaginative names for the creep on the Game Over screen. With his top hat and twirly moustache he looks like the kind of guy who'd tie a damsel to the railroad tracks - the cad!

The action takes place on top-down, isometric painted backdrops. You start off with a view of the entire game area, complete with every single enemy and NPC. Each map is a maze; a warren of

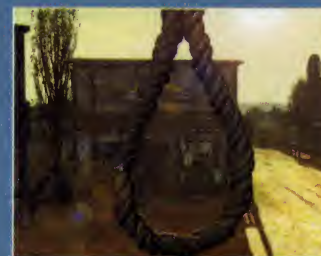
twisting possibilities that at first appears realistic, but soon reveals that certain access routes are denied to you. More than once it would be possible to finish a mission early, if only the map extended an extra centimetre in a given direction. But then this is more a game of Chess than a game of *Robotron* (*Erm... quite - Ed*).

There are three levels of zoom for the game map. Granted, the largest blows up all the sprites until they're quite primitive, and it's difficult to make anything out in the smallest view, but they're still very useful tools in planning your assault. It's also one of many features that makes *Desperados* stand head and shoulders above *Star Trek: Away Team*, its nearest rival in the marketplace at the moment.

Each mission has clearly defined goals, and to meet them there are certain unavoidable elements to be overcome. Each of the six characters you pick up on the quest has a highly specialised skill set, and the first level you get to control them is a tutorial that forces you to learn their ropes. These levels offer a checklist of their unique, and often ridiculous talents to practice. These are the exception; most levels are pure espionage, and the obstacles to victory are the dozens of guards scattered across the map.

QUICK ACTION

Top-down sprite-based tactical games are nothing if not finicky, especially when you can't let any of your characters die. More often than not you've only got one chance to get it right, as there's no second prize in a gunfight. Thus potential *Desperados* purchasers will be delighted to know that there is a means of buffering tricky commands for replay in the heat of battle: the Quick Action system. Simply click on that lazy guard while he's idly moping about, so when he inevitably makes his blind charge you needn't aim, just hit the spacebar. Note that you can only program up to three shots in advance, and there are often more enemies than that to worry about...

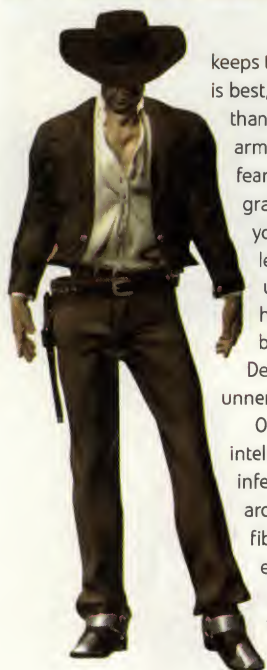
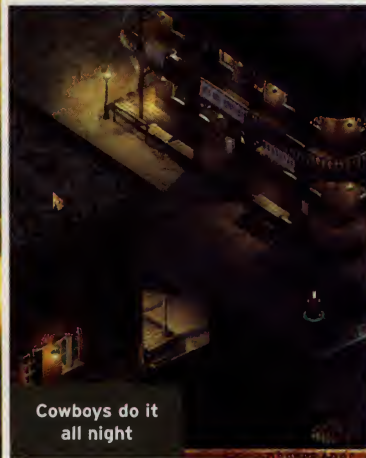


Wiggy Wiggy Wild

The enemies are well defined, with 25 distinct species ranging from incompetent plantation hands all the way through to seasoned bandito. By and large you will want to avoid their attention, and as such you'll have to take heed of their means of detecting you. Most significant is their cone of vision, filling an arc of about 60 degrees for a good few dozen metres. It's strongest close to them, but fades away towards the fringes. This represents the probability that you'll be detected at that range, and even when lying prone this is only a matter of time. It's best to stay out their line of sight entirely, if possible, and subdue them from behind if you can't avoid them entirely.

Even this is risky, as the game also





keeps track of sound. Crawling up to them is best, and even walking makes less noise than running. Once knocked out, any armed enemy can be knifed without any fear of moral reprisal. This kind of instant gratification is a great way to motivate yourself through otherwise gruelling levels, and is a safe alternative to mere unconsciousness, which has a nasty habit of wearing off. Stashing the body is then prudent, as in *Desperados* dead men have the unnerving ability to tell tales.

Or more accurately, the quasi-intelligent buddies of your victims can infer tales from seeing corpses lying around. The intellect, motivation, moral fibre and other variables of each and every character are monitored by the game engine, but even the dimmest will sound the alarm when you leave dead cowboys lying everywhere. It's usually best to haul them to an out-of-the-way out-house, and just dump them inside.

Also troublesome are the non-combatants that infest every level, the honest God-fearing citizens of the wild frontier who group bounty hunters in with heathens and Negroes. If they see you hit or kill someone, or see the body, or see you

brandishing a gun, or if they got up on the wrong side of the bed that morning, then they'll start making their alarm audible, and within seconds every enemy on the map will be heading straight for you. Also note that unlike in *Syndicate*, you are not allowed to kill the innocent. Knock them out if you have to, or avoid them if at all possible.

Wiggy Wiggy Wild Wild West

Because of all these compounding factors of "realism," everything and everyone in the game behaves in a predictable fashion, and the dominant factor in conquering the game is tactics, not luck. The designers have gone to great lengths to create a

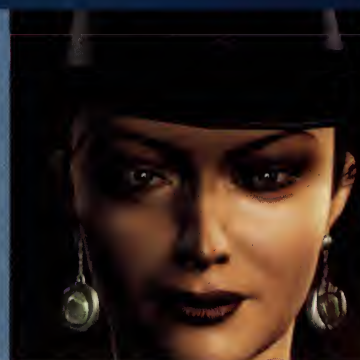
sense of plausibility, and as a result it's very easy to get emotionally involved in the action. In other words, sometimes when a game has you swearing like a dock, that's a good thing.

While sometimes you have no choice but to blast your way out of trouble, most of the time slow, meticulous ambushes are the best way to clear the map. This is reflected by the fact that most the attacks available to you are unconventional in nature. As the number of your posse swells, so does your options, and the ability to mix and match dozens of tactics ensures the gameplay never gets dull.

After all, you start off with a character

GARTER POWER

All the members of your team have a unique role to play, and each has their own firearm, unarmed attack, etc. But only Kate O'Hara uses the power of... seduction! The hardy pioneers of the old west are a sex-starved lot, and one glimpse of her garters is enough to send any red-blooded minion swooning! Watch in bemused awe as his cone of vision turns pink, and he staggers mindlessly towards her. From there a swift kick to the head will dispatch him to a slumber stocked with sultry saloon strumpets. Of course, Kate can't then tie him up or drag him out of sight - that's a man's work.





OUTRAGEOUS ACCENTS

Game enthusiasts dismayed at the current trend towards high quality voice acting can take heart at the production values of *Desperados*; the talent employed sounds like it's being paid in fortified wine. You'll question their motive, their honesty, their ethnicity, not to mention their sobriety before the game is done. Some characters you'll love to hate, and some you'll just have to love. But believing them, well, suspension of disbelief can only go so far...



who can hit anything with a throwing knife, knock anyone out with a single punch, and has an irritating musical watch to distract people with. Next on your shopping list is a guy who knows how to pour just the right amount of gunpowder from a barrel to leave an inflammable trail on the ground. Then

P11-233. That it doesn't demand every modern hardware bell and whistle is a product of good design as much as anything. The dated game genre plays into the hands of the setting, and in another conscious decision on the part of developer Spellbound everything has a yellowish tinge

"Mr. Leone" is the sidekick of the Chinese girl you pick up around level 20, and you can either use his fruity antics to distract guards, or just set him the task of ripping out someone's throat.

Desperados may have a budget look about it, but the game design is sound, and its implementation is as solid as a rock. While there is no multiplayer action, longevity is assured through the initial difficulty one has in completing the game, and then the freedom one has to replay it, trying different tactics in the same situations. What at first appears to be purely linear storyline is in fact an extremely versatile exercise in tactics and innovation. Or to put it another way, you'll hear the thunder and the brush of steel, and I'll hear the call of the west.

James Cottee

long time PC PowerPlay readers will be delighted to learn there's a monkey in there, too!

there's the one-eyed Civil War veteran, who can whip out an anatomically convincing scarecrow of himself to fool any guard. And a big burly Mexican, nick-named "Grizzly"...

Yeehah! Cowboy O!

Desperados isn't the most resource hungry game in the world. It can and will run on a

to it, as though the whole game was being played on the parched parchment of a wanted poster.

If that weren't enough to sell it to you, long time PC PowerPlay readers will be delighted to learn there's a monkey in there, too! Not the sarcastic Tony, unfortunately, but an honest-to-God simian none the less.

PCPP

FOR

- Great strategy
- Gun slinging
- Garters

AGAINST

- Devilishly difficult
- A little linear
- Somewhat silly

OVERALL

If you loved Commandos and want more, do not hesitate

86%

SETTLERS IV

You'd think they would have settled by now



DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Bluebyte

PUBLISHER

Bluebyte

DISTRIBUTOR

Ozisoft

PRICE

\$69.95

RATING

GB

NEED

PII-233
32MB RAM
4MB Videocard

WANT

PIII-450
64MB RAM
16MB Videocard

MULTIPLAYER

LAN, Bluebyte
Gamechannel

AVAILABLE

Now

ONLINE

www.fordham.edu/halsal/l/sbook12.html
Internet Medieval
Sourcebook at
Fordham University.
Where else?

PCPP

OVERALL

The best in a sorely
outdated series

65%

ZOOM ZOOM ZOOM!

Bluebyte has tweaked the Settlers interface for this fourth iteration. It's now possible to zoom the view gradually in and out, for instance. At one extreme, this allows a broader picture of your empire; at the other, it makes for a mess of pixels. Also, to scroll the map it's now necessary to right-click and hold while moving the mouse. Those familiar with Black & White's more natural 'land grab' method may well be disgruntled as Bluebyte's system confusingly inverts the x and y axes.



Hey little
bloke, get
back to
work!



Anyone who has been playing Black & White for the past two months will probably have had their fill of 'little blokes' by now. Anthony certainly has. However, there are some - myself included - who are born of a different breed.

Settlers 4 is a game for the little blokes connoisseur. Realtime strategy typically focuses on recruiting military units to conquer the enemy, with resource management and the economy relegated to sideshows. Here, the economy takes centre stage.

Games like Red Alert 2 and Starcraft shine in multiplayer because the limited base building means combat - the only time when the players actually interact - arrives quicker.

As a consequence of the time-consuming city - as opposed to base - building

adhered to by the Settlers series, its multiplayer options are rendered largely superfluous. This is definitely a solo experience.

Assembly line

City building eschews the usual abstractions of the genre by presenting everything onscreen. From land resources (deer, sheep, trees, etc) to the tools and weapons lying around the village or in the storehouse, and those ubiquitous little blokes, what you see is what you get. There are no inexhaustible mines, no unit production houses, nothing is iconic in any way. It's a nice, logical touch, and stimulates a greater degree of empathy toward your villagers - they seem... real.

Developing an empire involves assigning professions to your little blokes, constructing buildings to obtain the resources and manufacture the products to fuel the economy, and founding military outposts to expand territory. Unfortunately each game tends to follow the same pattern: start off small with woodcutters and fisherman, progress through iron ore mines and blacksmiths, and finish with castles and

monuments, before the inevitable incursion into enemy heartland.

The campaigns attempt to mix this up with multiple opponents and/or an undersupply of a particular resource, but such deviations are minor. There is little opportunity for telling gambits when the player's strategic decisions are limited to assembling the factory production line in a slightly different order. That's not to say the establishment of an efficient economy isn't extremely satisfying, but rather the effort expended to get there is more a matter of persistence than virtuosity.

Settlers 4 is far from a flawed outing for Bluebyte; indeed in many ways it is the most accomplished in the series. Yet prolonged play evokes an overwhelming sense of tiredness. Bluebyte has once more mined a comfortable formula and diligently extracted it yet again. This is a depressingly conservative title, one that is to all intents and purposes identical to its innovative eight-year-old forefather. The franchise now occupies a territory that has been well and truly settled. Perhaps it's time for Bluebyte to rediscover its pioneering spirit.

David Wildgoose

F1 WORLD GP 2000

Ready for a career in Formula One?

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Eidos

PUBLISHER

Eidos

DISTRIBUTOR

Ozisoft

PRICE

\$79.95

RATING

G

NEED

PII-266
64MB RAM
3D Videocard (D3D)

WANT

PIII-450
128MB RAM
3D Soundcard

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

AVAILABLE

Now

ONLINE

www.forix.com
www.fia.com
www.eidos.com
A bunch of official sites probably



ITS A KIND OF MAGIC

Formula One sims have lost that certain something that used to make them magical. I recall the first time I ever loaded Geoff Crammond's first attempt on my trusty Amiga. I was immediately overwhelmed with how close I was suddenly brought to the action. But nowadays, things seem much more bland. This decline could be attributed to the sheer abundance of titles available, but I feel the lack of evolution is closer to the truth. Developers of F1 sims recently have been so caught up in the process of the impressing the eyes, they've forgotten that to make that special title you must impress the mind as well.



It has begun! With the genre of auto simulation reaching new heights recently, it's always tough to come up with a new, unique and plausible angle with which to present what is the essentially the same action to the player. Let's face it, the standard F1 sim options of Practice, Single-Race and Championship are getting very old these days, and even with the dawn of online multiplayer match-ups, there was always something missing.

not normally an arcade fan myself, in the end I was surprised to find it very addictive

terrible! Audio and visual options are as per standard, but when it comes to configuring the controller options, the interface becomes a crazy mess of axis assignments and confusing function allocations.

Arcade driving

With that ugly business out of the way, let's get to the good stuff! The first of the two racing modes is arcade, and it lives up to its name. In this mode, Formula One World Grand Prix 2000 takes on the role of coin-op machine. Beginning with four credits, players must compete in a series of races, completing a challenge within each in order to advance to the next. The whole simulation has been modified to accommodate the arcade-driving theme. From the cheesy American race announcer to extremely the relaxed vehicle physics, the whole arcade machine feel has been perfectly implemented. Not normally a fan of arcade action myself, in the end I was surprised to find it very addictive.

Career mode, whilst not utilising a very sophisticated design, sets the new standard for F1 and driving

simulations. Prior to participating in an event, players undertake a series of pre-season ability tests. After each test a rating out of 100 is scored, and the average of all these scores is what dictates which teams will offer you a contract for the coming season. Drivers each have an email box in which messages appear before and after each race. Message content can be anything from rival team offers, to team earnings and performance reports. Naturally players can review the status of each team and driver in the championship, and may also elect to modify the realism along the way. An odd feature, but one that works in context.

You'll notice I haven't mentioned the visuals up until this point, and that's because there's really not much worth mentioning. They're adequate, but don't represent anything close to the standard of the genre.

The dice has been thrown, and it's not a bad roll. Here's hoping career mode becomes a regular addition to future Formula One releases!

Edward Fox



PCPP

OVERALL

This is the dawn of a new era in motorsport sims

78%

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to introduce Formula One World Grand Prix 2000 from Eidos, the very first F1 simulation ever to offer a full career mode! First impressions could easily ruin anyone's opinion of this title. Preceded by a mediocre intro at best, the front end is very sparse and unappealing. A total of four options present themselves within the main menu, of which only two are modes of racing.

Though not overly critical to the smooth presentation of any sim, the game options do warrant discussion. They're bloody



COSSACKS

A history tutorial and grand adventure in one

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
GSC Game World

PUBLISHER
CDV Software

DISTRIBUTOR
QV Software

PRICE
\$89.95

RATING
M

NEED
Duron 600
32MB RAM
450MB HD

WANT
PIII-800
64MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER
Yes

AVAILABLE
Now

ONLINE

www.cossacks.de
The German
strategy world

www.strategyplanet.com
The rest of the
strategy world



PROGRESS AT ALL COSTS

In Civilization for example, there were a number of ages where new advancements could make your life easier... or at least different. You can advance only once in Cossacks, known as Progressing to the C18th. This will allow you to make more powerful regular units as well as special items like the Montgolfier balloon that reveals the entire map.



Might is right. But only when you're the might

"As we approached that battlefield, a terrible cold gripped me. My horse and those bearing my comrades were afear'd. Our French enemies had amassed. And amassed well. We were bitterly outnumbered but our pikemen stood their ground by the wild cries of our officers. The English line braced as the French forces descended on us wildly..."

watching masses of troops descend on one another is an epic gaming moment

Cossacks is a most detailed depiction of historic combat. Not to be confused with the sprawling time machines of strategy like Civilization or Age of Empires, Cossacks is a sincere simulation war game. It is concerned with the mechanics of battles as much as the victory. There are no documentary games but this is what Cossacks: European War feels like - the "how" is just as important as the "what" and "where".

The forces of sixteen nations are at war over various strips of Europe. To overcome your enemies, towns must be built and within them barracks, blacksmiths, town halls, shipyards and the like. Peasants take command of construction and offensive units have to be built in their respective buildings.

Resource gathering is in the standard mould of the genre with a few subtle differences. Different structures are needed for each resource - mines for metals, windmills for foods, etc - but these resources are endless. This means bottomless mines and fields that never grow arid. A nice option especially since resource gathering is a secondary concern for most in a strategy game. The real focus of Cossacks is simulated battle.

To the battlefield

Far from a dry academic war style, Cossacks is unique. Historical accuracy is one of the aims, which means some of the infamous confrontations available include the Thirty Years War, The War of the Spanish Succession and The Seven Years War. Much

of the effort has been centred on the tactical arrangement and deployment of troops in an effective way. You can't build up a million of your strongest troop and expect to overrun the enemy without direction.

Battle strategies employed are crucial to any unit being at all effective. These strategies are outlined briefly in the tutorial but no doubt those who are literate in battle history would know how to use these units in other ways. This is the great strength of the game: units are strong together and all but useless alone. There is no "regular" way to cheat on the battlefield because it's all tactics. The missing link in this concept is the inadequate tutorials.

The introductory tutorials are patchy and unclear. Every aspect of the game is covered but in little depth and in a haphazard fashion. The inner beauty of the game would have been better served had some more effort been put into the tutorials. Some important details of play are not covered and can only be discovered in game. The result is a challenging learning curve for the novice strategist.

FORMATIONS

To create a formation of infantry units, an officer and a drummer are needed. The formation is then created from the surrounding units. These units can be arranged in Rank (a single line), Column and Square formations. Each formation can consist of 15, 36, 72, 120 or 160 but no more or less. It's a little inflexible but that's the army for you.



Moving units over land and water



For the experienced strategy gamer on the other hand, Cossacks is a gift. The maps are very big, allowing generals to assemble masses of troops (into the thousands) to send at each other via Deathmatch. Multiplayer is where the game will come into its own because the singleplayer missions are generally too scripted and linear. The ability to assemble giant armies - especially in light of resource management - is Cossacks' greatest strength. Watching masses of troops descend on one another is an epic gaming moment.

Time to die

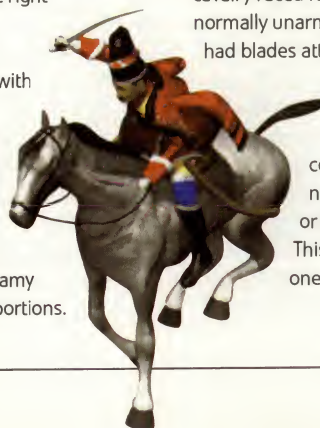
"Our officers held us true and well enough. The greater French forces fell to our swords and pikes and cannons, for they were misformed. Our battle agenda was served, praise God. We march on depleted, in the hope that their greater number were placed afore and so leave the weaker after..."

The time scale is considerably shorter than in other games, encompassing only the 17th and 18th centuries. So there are fewer

units to play and features to build which is a distinct limitation when compared to other strategy titles. Another limitation is that of the sixteen nations, extra and vastly different units are few and far between. So in fact, you have sixteen very similar sides to play with. This is no doubt a serious oversight.

The early singleplayer missions are a downfall in Cossacks. Typically a small band of warriors needs to be lead to a camp or city on the opposite side of the map. Your troops are often wildly under-resourced and outnumbered. Rather than offer an encouraging nudge in the right direction, a wrong turn results in an absolute trouncing. This, together with the tutorials, means the casual gamer will not find an inviting welcome.

But for those with the patience to sit out the hours of education, Cossacks has a warm, creamy centre of Napoleonic proportions.



Learn a more realistic style of battle with concessions only to strong strategy, and this will be a rewarding experience in the long run. Cossacks: European War is recommended for strategy enthusiasts, especially those with some historical knowledge to supplement their enthusiasm. Take command of a particular army, build your towns, establish resources, create and deploy an army to conquer all of Christendom.

"We approached the last of the French defences before their fair city, two columns of musketeers. A smile passes my lips as we cavalry raced forward to smite them. The normally unarmed French musketeers now had blades attached to the weapons. These bayonettes as they are known, have lain waste to my brethren. I fled as a coward into the South and now wait for either the French or the English to have my head. This European War will have me one way or another so it seems."

John Dewhurst

PCPP

FOR

- Strategy - just strategy
- Big maps

AGAINST

- Poor tutorial
- Average missions

OVERALL

A very strong strategy title for the enthusiast

79%

FREEDOM FIRST RESISTANCE

Introducing PC gaming's first ever Spanish heroine

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Red Storm

PUBLISHER

Red Storm

DISTRIBUTOR

Ubisoft

PRICE

\$69.95

RATING

M

NEED

P-200
64MB RAM
8MB Videocard

WANT

PII-450
128MB RAM
16MB Videocard

MULTIPLAYER

No

AVAILABLE

Now



Well-disguised
crates but crates
nonetheless

This is going to be a difficult review to write. Freedom: First Resistance is a rough gem, its myriad flaws matched by brilliance at every corner. First impressions are quite promising, the game initially appearing like mix of The Nomad Soul and Commandos. It's an adventure game with much dialogue, combat, stealth, mission-based objectives and squad-based tactics, all rolled into one.

the squad nature lends a tangible sense of camaraderie - it's not you vs the world

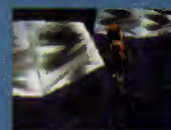
However, second impressions are less convincing, as the crap bits become more obvious. Third impressions only reinforce those second impressions. But the fact that enough time will be spent playing Freedom to formulate fourth impressions means it must have something going for it after all. As I said, it's going to be a difficult review.

Human genocide

The player slips into the leather jacket and denim pants of heroine Angel Sanchez, a nascent revolutionary in a contemporary world under siege from a genocidal alien race called the Catteni. While the majority of the remaining humans either live in squalid prison camps or have been recruited as 'peacekeepers' by the Catteni, a few pockets of resistance still exist to defy alien rule.

ANGELS VERSUS ALIENS

Freedom's main character, Angel Sanchez, is utterly unique amongst videogame heroines. Not only is she voiced with a distinct - and far from comically stereotyped - Spanish accent, but she's also proportioned in a refreshingly realistic fashion. Anne McAffrey, whose novels provided the inspiration for the game, would surely approve. Having said that, when she walks Angel does swing her hips in a most alluring... (Snip! - Ed.)



Indeed, at the end of the second mission, Angel predictably joins up with the Resistance. This highlights one of Freedom's key features: cliché... sorry, I mean squad-based play.

Up to three characters can be controlled during any given mission. They each possess a small number of unique skills - Leo handles technology, Claire is an athlete, etc - that may be required to complete certain objectives. The effect of such an approach is three-fold. One, the developer has crafted obstacles which can only be overcome via teamwork (usually involving characters being in several different places at once). Two, with relative ease the player can utilise the additional pairs of hands to his tactical advantage (covering fire, ambushing, etc). Three, the limitations of the AI pathfinding will have the player cursing Red Storm's mother. Like much of Freedom, it's a real mixed bag.

Nevertheless, the squad nature does lend a tangible sense of camaraderie - it's not just you versus the world out there. As the game

progresses, Angel develops relationships with the other characters and is often able to return to the locations of previous missions to find out how they're going. It all contributes to fleshing out the game world in a satisfying manner.

Convoluting locks

Everything Red Storm has done right is at least partially undone by a design flaw. It's possible to sneak up behind enemies and take them down in one hit, but engage in melee combat and it's a case of click-and-hope. You can always choose between two or three missions, the primary objectives are consistently varied, and the NPCs will respond according to previous events, yet much of the time you're merely finding ever more convoluted ways to unlock doors.

Essentially this is a poor man's Deus Ex. Which is no bad thing considering that game's status, but hardly a ringing endorsement.

David Wildgoose

PCPP

OVERALL

A delicate balance
of inspiration and
incompetence

64%

WORMS WORLD PARTY

Liked Scorched Earth, but wanted to play it online? Read on, worm...

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Team 17

PUBLISHER

Titus

DISTRIBUTOR

Ozisoft

PRICE

\$69.95

RATING

GB

NEED

P-100
32MB RAM
2MB Videocard
340 MB HDD

WANT

PII-233
64MB RAM
4MB Videocard
56K modem or
network card

MULTIPLAYER

TCP/IP, LAN

AVAILABLE

Now

ONLINE

www.lynnemusic.com/worms

A tribute page from the genius behind the Worms theme music: Bjorn Lynne!

PCPP

OVERALL

Definitely better than sex; on a par with drugs

90%



Don't ever play Worms with James - he knows his sheep too well

Worms is probably the single best multiplayer game of the past decade, if not ever. Each new iteration has refined its winning formula, each time seemingly achieving the impossible: to improve on perfect. Everybody loves Worms, a sublime blend of artillery action and animated antics.

For those unfamiliar with the concept, Worms is a turn-based game of tactical bastardry. Up to six players - human or AI - each control up to four worms scattered through a two-dimensional battlefield. With the limited amount of time and firepower at one's disposal, one must waste one's opponents until only one player remains. The AI has the advantage of being able to precisely punt projectiles in pixel-perfect patterns, while humans have the power of imagination. For instance, the AI may cluster bomb one from the other side of the map, only to find its entire squad uzied into a minefield, and oblivion.

Within this basic framework there are dozens of weapons, options, missions and maps, and limitless possibility. Some rule sets emphasise conventional weapons, like the shotty, minigun and pistol, where others highlight high explosives, like dynamite, Holy Hand Grenades and the dreaded Banana Bomb. There are scores of singleplayer



missions, but the real strength of Worms is in multiplayer. With randomly generated terrain and Man's endless capacity for hatred, Worms is a game you can never get tired of.

Online gaming: No backbone required

But not everyone has flatmates, or siblings, or friends. Which is why Worms World Party now offers online play for the very first time. The primitive nature of the graphics means that lag is not an issue, and the Internet

deathmatch options are there; you can even play with a team against distant enemies.

Purchasers of Worms Armageddon may need more than online options to tempt them. Well, there are all new singleplayer missions, new sound banks and graphics, the Wormopaedia, and training modes. The biggest improvements lie in the expanded custom options; team flags, gravestones, sounds and weapon spreads are all malleable. Rounding out the mix is "Wormpot," a slot machine interface for randomising the rule set. Many options involve crates, my favourite being "Crates, Crates and More Crates."

They call me Dr. Worm

But the basic gameplay formula is unchanged, and this is a double-edged sword. But if you don't own Worms at all, then by Christ there's no excuse.

James Cottee

THE MYSTERY OF THE ARTIST...

For the first time ever there is now an interactive manual included with Worms, the Wormopaedia. Its purpose is twofold: to give an expert run-down on every weapon and tactic from the designers themselves, and provide a disturbing insight into the creative minds behind Worms. When you've topped-up on TOP TIPS, you can read all about where the Concrete Donkey got its name, and the strange worm Gods that these guys worship.



provides a bounty of potential foes. Built-in chat options allow for pre- and post-game discussion, along with the chance to distract rival players in the middle of their turns. Competitive, co-operative and

DEEP SPACE 9 THE FALLEN

Trek games haven't fallen on hard times

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

The Collective

PUBLISHER

Simon & Schuster

DISTRIBUTOR

Ozisoft

PRICE

\$69.95

RATING

M

NEED

PII-233
64MB RAM
150MB HDD
8MB Videocard

WANT

PIII-450
128MB RAM
650MB HDD
32MB Videocard
3D Soundcard (EAX)

MULTIPLAYER

No

AVAILABLE

Now

ONLINE

members.tripod.com/TheCelestialTemple
Everything you could ever want to know about DS9, in anal detail

www.ds9thefallen.com
Official site. The message board contains useful tips

PCPP

OVERALL

Doesn't do quite enough to be a classic, but well crafted & enjoyable

84%



Star Trek ought to be a gaming cash cow. It has a large number of fans, an enormous back-story, and locations, weapons and adversaries that should make perfect game material. However, few Star Trek games have managed anything better than mediocrity. It's only recently that developers have started to find the right balance between 'Trekiness' and gameplay, and happily, The Collective appears to have found that balance with DS9: The Fallen.

The game can be played as one of three characters from the series: Captain Sisko, DS9 commanding officer; Major Kira, First Officer of DS9; and Lieutenant Commander Worf, a Klingon with a deep voice. The story concerns the Bajoran cult of the Pah-Wraiths. The Orbs of the Pah-Wraiths are powerful artifacts, capable of creating wormholes. Various factions seek to use the power of the Orbs, while the Federation is pretty keen for them not to. This may mean something to you if you're a Star Trek fan. However, rest assured that even if you're not, it's an enjoyable story anyway.

Tweakage

The Fallen is a thirdperson shooter, and the game mechanics are broadly similar to other thirdperson games. Gameplay revolves



Captain Sisko enjoys a spot of prawning

around combat, ledge jumping, item finding and so on. However, The Collective can be congratulated for improving this style of gameplay through good camera control. Sensible level design ensures that the character's body rarely obscures the camera and that important objects (such as ledges or enemies) remain visible. The game uses a tweaked version of the Unreal Tournament engine, and as such the graphics are very good. There are a wide range of well-realised environments in the game, including a Bajor temple, several spacecraft, and an alien jungle. Unfortunately, the locations are mostly quite dark and extensive use is made of grey.

The Collective has gone to some length to recreate the ambience of the television series. The game's cutscenes are highly cinematic, including sweeping views of

EXOTIC WEAPONS



The weapons are a mixture of existing Star Trek models and original designs. There are some standard types, like the pistol-with-endless-ammo (the phaser), grenade launcher and automatic rifle. However, there are also some more unusual weapons, such as the shock blade, which discharges an energy beam over a short distance, Worf's bat'leth sword, and the plasma thrower. There are primary and secondary firing modes for all weapons.



space and ships docking at the space station or entering wormholes.

Several areas are modelled on locations from the series, including parts of the starship Defiant and areas within station Deep Space 9. Various characters from the series are encountered during the game. Most of the voice acting is done by the original actors, and sound in general is well done.

Nameless one

There are some disappointments. AI opponents don't show a lot of tactical awareness. They rarely seek cover or attempt to draw you into an ambush; they just do their best to kill you. The story is very linear and disappointingly short, although being able to play different missions with three characters provides some replayability. Finally, it is not possible to choose a name for saved games - a minor gripe, but annoying if more than one person is playing the game on one computer.

The Fallen is well put together, and only let down by some minor problems. It will appeal to Star Trek fans, but other gamers shouldn't be put off by the Star Trek theme - it is worth playing simply as an action game with a good story.

David Thornby

HEIST

American McGee's ScanDisk

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Crimson

PUBLISHER
Virgin

DISTRIBUTOR
Ozisoft

PRICE
\$69.95

RATING
MA

NEED
P-233
32Mb RAM
350Mb HDD
8Mb Videocard

WANT
Duron 500
64Mb RAM
500Mb HDD
16Mb videocard

MULTIPLAYER
No

AVAILABLE
Now



SELF ESTEEM

Surely you're expecting a game this bad to be pathetically easy and offer no challenge whatsoever. But no. Heist is very difficult. But this is not because you as a gamer lack developed skills to master its deviousness. It's because the game is so badly designed it's pretty much impossible to finish the first level without cheating. Posit: you must hire two goons. Each goon demands \$2000. But as far as we can tell (and we became perversely determined at this) there isn't \$2000 in all the buildings on the level, and you need \$4000. On top of this you have a 14 minute time limit. But that doesn't mean you have to finish the level in under 14 minutes, oh no, you have to finish the level in exactly 14 minutes; should you impossibly retrieve the two goons in record time, you have to hang around until 2300h for the bus. Don't bother cheating though; four times out of five the game will crash at 2230h for no apparent reason.

O One of the first things we realised about Heist was that Heist is an anagram for Shite, which is astoundingly apt, because this game represents one of the finest examples of how not to design a computer game. We'll say this for Bass Avenger: it had no pretensions to be anything other than a brief Christmas Day diversion. Heist actually tries to be a real game.



two coloured bars move across the screen, representing the progress of the case

The premise is fairly sound; Johnny 'The Gent' is a master criminal and must collect about him a select cadre of likewise master criminals and rip off increasingly more lucrative targets, from regional building societies to massive multinational banks.

So Heist is a squad-based tactical cops'n'robbers game. Unfortunately though, every sensible design decision that Crimson could have made seems to have been actively and conscientiously avoided.

Flat earth

Starting a level is totally bog-standard; select a team, equip the team and enter the level.

The zone of operations is defined by the borders of a 2D isometric playfield dotted about with buildings, vehicles and tiny jerky marionette people.

None of the buildings can actually be entered. When Johnny 'The Gent' approaches a building his tiny jerky marionette body disappears from the playfield and a tiny cameo portrait is displayed next to the building. If an NPC is in the building, the NPC will start talking without fanfare, introduction, and without even giving his name. If Johnny 'The Gent' wishes to interact with the building a little more, a right-click-and-hold brings up a menu from which Johnny can choose to buy things (if the building is a shop), case the building in preparation for a heist, and then of course attempt to heist the building.

It is at this point that the above subtitle 'American McGee's ScanDisk' begins to make sense. While casing a building, two coloured bars move toward the right of the screen,

representing the progress of the case, and the level of suspicion Johnny's casing causes. The game actually calls this a suspicionometer. Once cased, Johnny then waits while two different coloured bars move back toward the left of the screen, hoping that the red Alarm bar doesn't beat the green Heist bar.

And that's about it. Johnny can't case certain buildings without certain team members, and using a selection of fairly lacklustre equipment makes the green Heist bar move to the left more quickly.

With a completely indestructible playfield, no combat to speak of, intermittent sound effects, truly awful voice acting, ugly sprites and all the gameplay appeal of watching your hard drive defragment, Heist should be avoided at all costs. Indeed, if you see someone else approaching a sales counter with it, consider it your solemn duty to crash-tackle them into a stand of Gangsters.

Justin Hoffman

PCPP

OVERALL

At least with ScanDisk you achieve something

7%

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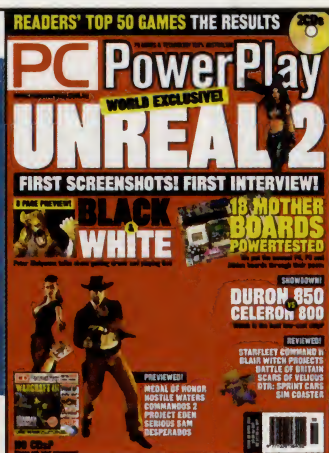
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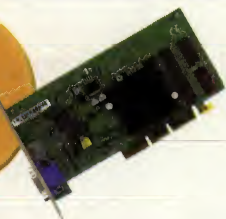
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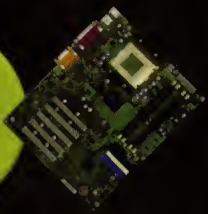
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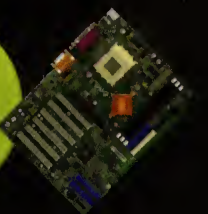
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IN REVIEW

The silicon state of the art

TECH



This month folks I discovered the beauty that is Windows 2000 Professional. I'd hummed and hahed about taking the Win2K step because, well, I was afraid. As Big Tony says, "Change ain't good Leon". But now I can safely say you have nothing to fear. Win2K is indeed the promised land. A land where you can leave your computer on for three days and not worry about coming back to a blue screen of death and a likewise dead hard drive.

For those of you out there worried about compatibility with your impressive collection of games, stay cool. For a start, you can preserve your old Win9x when you install Win2K. Besides which, I have yet to find a game that worked under Win98SE that refuses to work under Win2K. Especially once DirectX8.0 is installed, life couldn't be easier. And the desktop looks exactly like a Win9x desktop, so half the time you won't even realise you are running Win2K.

Of course there are a number of games that have difficulty with Win2K, but if you preserve your Win9x install as described above, you simply reboot into the appropriate operating system when you feel life can't go on until you've played some more Star Trek: New Worlds. However, you may notice that the games that don't work under Win2K didn't get scores much above 70% in this fine magazine...

On a final note to really hammer home the unbridled love that is Win2K, one of my personal favourites Abe's Exoddus simply refused to work under Win98SE and DirectX8.0. Now I don't know if that's just my machine, or what, but switch to Win2K and Abe is back in all of his glory. God Bless Win2K.

As for this month's tech section, we've gathered together a brace of 17" monitors for those of you with limited funds and limited space. Also pay special attention to Microtech's Maverick Games PC on page 94... even the mighty Beast should be worried about this one. Very impressive.

anthonyf@next.com.au



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Screen Test

17" MONITOR POWERTEST BY ANTHONY FORDHAM AND JACK KULYK

■ And so the endless debate rages on: which is the most important component of your precious PC? After all, without a motherboard nothing runs, without a processor nothing runs, and without a videocard, well, nothing runs. Since everything in a system depends on every other thing in a system, we have to ask ourselves which component can most dramatically improve the quality of our gaming life. And the answer to that is quite simply, the monitor.

Remember, this is the thing you'll have to stare at for hours on end as you pick your way through all the difficult philosophical conundrums posited in Planescape: Tormet, your window on the rich and immersive world of Myst 3 (ahem) and your portal into the non-stop comedy romp of Bass Avenger.

This month we've decided to come back to earth for once and take a look at nine 17" monitors. We could have PowerTested 19 or even 21 inch models, but we feel most of you have gone out and spent the bulk of your cash on the videocards and motherboards we recommended, and have only a paltry few hundred bucks left over for a screen.

Also, to fit a 19 or 21 inch monitor into your life takes quite some rearranging of the furniture of your soul, whereas a 17" model fits neatly in the hole left by the 14 or 15 inch monitor you've just pitched over the side into the local waste disposal facility.

These are monitors for the Person On The Street, for the Average Joe, and they should take care of all your visual needs for at least the next five years. The only real disadvantage with these screens is that most of them only support resolutions up to 1280x1024 which means you won't be able to go totally insane in Quake 3 Arena with your overclocked GeForce2 Ultra.

Still, to be honest, the only time we ever run Quake3 higher than 1024x768 is when we are benchmarking some new piece of kit, and hell, a 17" monitor is streets ahead of the 15" midget you no doubt received way back when you bought your first \$4500 Osborne 386SX running at 25MHz.

So pull up a 17" monitor and get gaming. It's your window to a bright new future. And with PCPP's advice, you can now choose the window that's just perfect for you.

HOW WE TESTED



Beside the mandatory games tests, we also took a look at a DVD (in this case the Sound of Music... mmn, Julie Andrews) and examined some 24bit bitmaps from www.digitalblasphemy.com. We set each monitor up alongside the previous monitor in the PowerTest, and also a Philips 107P representing 'as good as it gets' and an ancient 15" monstrosity that was so old the brand had fallen off which we found in the back office, representing 'the pit of hell.' We used a Matrox G400 for 2D imaging, and took advantage of this

card's dualhead technology to run two monitors simultaneously. For 3D performance we used an ASUS V71100 TwinHead which also allowed us to run two monitors at the same time.

In game testing we used the ubiquitous Quake3 for hard core 3D action, and Planescape: Tormet for fiddly 2D sprite performance. Also, the arrival of Myst3 this month (reviewed page 68) provided the opportunity to examine some extremely high detailed and high contrast backgrounds on various monitors.



PHILIPS 107T REAL FLAT

DISTRIBUTOR	Philips
PRICE	\$649
URL	www.philips.com.au

If price were a consideration in the Power award, then the Philip 107T would have snatched the crown from Sony's FD Trinitron E220. This monitor is nearly neck-and-neck with the far more expensive Sony, and features Philips' short tube, so this monitor takes up less space than many 15" models.

The most interesting part of this monitor is the inclusion of Philips' own LightFrame technology. LightFrame, when activated by a small driver, allows the user to draw a marquee box on part of the screen, whereupon that region will have all its colour and brightness enhanced.

This is most notably of benefit during DVD playback, and in terms of brightness and vividness was streets ahead of the competition, even the Sony. Unfortunately though, any text in a LightFrame activated region is considerably blurred and difficult to read.

Setup is simplicity itself, with a fairly conservative On Screen Display and all controls relatively easy to divine. Colour reproduction is very good, but like all the aperture grille monitors in the PowerTest, two tiny shadow lines are very faintly visible, although in our estimation these are a small price to pay for a superior picture.

The screen is Really Flat (capitals added by Philips) with no curve on any of the layers, so the picture is quite sharp. However, at higher resolutions such as the maximum of 1280x1024, there was some small degree of blurring, so this time at least, Sony still maintains the Power advantage.

This is an excellent monitor, and if you are looking for a professional-level screen but don't want to pay the \$150 Sony premium, then the Philips 107T is an almost mandatory choice for the display connoisseur.



ACER ACERVIEW P791

DISTRIBUTOR	Acer Australia
PRICE	\$729
URL	www.acercm.com.au

The AcerView P791 is a very able professional-level 17" flat screen monitor, which surprisingly offers much of the functionality of a 19" monitor in a slimmer, more petit 17" model.

For a start, while most monitors in this PowerTest have a maximum resolution of 1280x1024 @ 60Hz, the AcerView P791 supports resolutions up to 1600x1200, albeit at an eye-melting 60Hz. However, it is perfectly feasible to run the monitor at 1280x1024 @ 75Hz which offers considerably more desktop real estate than 1024x768.

Acer has also included a one-touch auto calibration button with this model, so the fiddly business of setting up the monitor for each new video card you cycle through your machine can largely be taken care of with the press of a single button. Occasionally, in practice we found the auto calibration button to get things a little bit wrong, but it certainly never failed to point the screen in the right direction, as it were, making further calibration that much simpler.

Unfortunately though, all this 19" functionality seems to have come at a price. The picture tube is absolutely enormous, with far and away the largest front-to-back dimension of all the monitors tested. The AcerView P791 takes up as much space as a 19" Philips or Sony monitor, so you might as well save up for the bigger screen and use the limited space in your exciting loft apartment more wisely.

Also, in an attempt to be jack-of-all-resolutions, the P791 is necessarily master of none, and image quality was simply not up to the standard of the Sony or Philips professional models. This coupled with the extremely large size and the relatively high price (beaten only by the Sony) makes the AcerView P791, while powerful, very difficult to recommend.



SONY FD TRINITRON E220

DISTRIBUTOR	Sony Australia
PRICE	\$809
URL	www.sony.com.au

Sony may have recently lost the 21" crown to the Philips 201P (see The Beast p104) but in the more petit 17" market, the FD Trinitron E220 is still king of the hill. The maximum supported resolution is on par with the other professional monitors in this PowerTest, at 1280x1024 @ 60Hz. However, it's in picture quality where Sony really excels.

This monitor was much brighter and crisper than any of the others featured here, although the Philips 107T came very close. The E220's representation of colour was just that much brighter, and of course didn't have to rely on LightFrame technology to bring out the best in DVDs and the 24bit bitmap tests.

There was a time when Sony monitors stayed head and shoulders above the opposition by offering very slightly larger screens; while most 17" monitors were actually 15.8" viewable, the Trinitrons were always 16". Nowadays the opposition has caught up, and many other models not only offer 16" viewable display areas, but also use Aperture Grille technology, once the exclusive domain of the Trinitron.

Of course, the fact that Sony pioneered this technology really shows on this monitor. The monitor just feels more solid than anything else in the PowerTest.

The controls are a little bit odd - using an eight-way hat to select items on the OSD - but offer an extra amount of customisation, including separate RGB colour temperatures so the monitor can be precisely adjusted for your particular lighting environment. Of course all this comes at a price, and the E220 is the most expensive monitor tested here.

However, with such solid build quality and a superior picture, it should come as no surprise that the FD Trinitron E220 is the winner of this month's Power award.

PCPP				
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PCPP				
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PCPP				
POWER				
VALUE				
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SYNCMaster 753DF

URL www.emagen.com.au

However, the bottom line is that for less than \$500 this is an excellent 'flat screen' monitor which provides a very good picture and takes the pain out of the realisation that you've spent all your money on neon case lights and left only half a G for a screen. A worthy winner of this month's Value award.



URL www.philips.com.au

While this monitor is, as mentioned above, quite cheap, the fact that there are flatscreen models available at similar prices, particularly the Acer G773, the 107S is really let down but its fishbowl construction, despite the inclusion of DVD-enhancing LightFrame technology.



FLATRON 795FT

URL www.techbuy.com.au

However, with near-professional performance but only mid-range price, the LG Flatron 795FT is a very impressive performer, and DVDs and games alike looked great. Were it not for the Samsung's much lower price and similar specification, this Flatron would have walked away with the Value award this month. As it is, considered it highly recommended.






ACFR

ACERVIEW G773

DISTRIBUTOR Acer Australia

PRICE \$529

URL www.acercm.com.au

 The most immediately interesting thing about this monitor wasn't its features, its specification, it's funky stylin' or even its price. The most immediately interesting thing about this monitor was the fact that, apart from an Acer label and different coloured buttons, it is identical to the Mitsubishi DiamondView 1786FD, reviewed just a few columns over. So as a kind of protest against late stage capitalism and the illusion of choice when really there's no choice at all, we're going to print the same review twice.

With a 0.25 dot pitch and a typical maximum resolution of 1280x1024 @ 60Hz the Acer G773 / Mitsubishi DiamondView 1786FD is a very capable monitor and representative of the kind of quality we expected in this PowerTest. And the flat screen did provide welcome relief from the fishbowl horror of the Hitachi CM615

Colour reproduction was able and our 24bit bitmaps looked just fine and performance in games was pretty much what we were expecting, although nothing about the monitor's overall performance really jumped out and bit us.

Screen controls are all perfectly standard and easy to come to grips with although quite a bit of readjustment is required should you change videocards. And the usual caveat applies; if you own a GeForce2 Ultra or - God forbid you should be so rich - a GeForce3, then this screen is simply unable to do your fabulous card justice and you should continue saving for a 19" model.

The AcerView G773 / Mitsubishi DiamonView 1786FD, while capable, is not a spectacular monitor nor it is priced particularly competitively. The rich should go for the Sony or Philips 107T and the thrifty should instead cast their eyes over the Samsung 753DF, the worthy winner of this month's Value award.



HITACHI

CM615

DISTRIBUTOR Emagen**PRICE** \$430

URL www.emagen.com.au

Every PowerTest needs a whipping-boy and sadly, the Hitachi CM615 has come up short and unwittingly bared its metaphorical buttocks for a right-royal metaphorical buttock kicking.

It's kind of a shame because in its time the Hitcachi CM615 was an excellent monitor and had been recommended by PCPP. But this was in the dark and distant past. This is the future, where the flat screen and the aperture grille rule supreme, and the poor CM615 can't keep up.

Actually we're being a trifle melodramatic, because the CM615 is still a very good and very cheap monitor. Its performance specification is right on par with other models in the PowerTest, with a maximum resolution of 1280x124 @ 60Hz although it's only really healthy to run it as high as 1024 x 768 @ 75Hz. Also, this is a Hitachi monitor made by Hitachi and thus has a Hitachi tube in it, so you can be sure that the people who made your monitor are responsible for the entire package, whereas some of these other screens, notably the carbon-copy Mitsubishi and Acer G773, have all manner of different components from different manufacturers jammed into the housing.

Unfortunately the thing that really strikes us about the Hitachi is the extreme curvature of the screen. Even in its heyday the CM615 was a fairly curvy monitor, and after becoming accustomed as we have to flat screens and even LCD displays, going back to a fishbowl is seriously bad for our karma.

However, our DVD and 24bit bitmap tests showed the CM615 is still up to the essential task of displaying stuff, and at such a low price it's a worthy consideration for the extremely strapped for cash. However if you have come to expect a little more from your monitor, then sadly the Hitachi CM615 is destined only to disappoint.



MITSUBISHI

DIAMONDVIEW 1786FD

DISTRIBUTOR Mitsubishi Electronics

PRICE \$569

URL www.mitsubishi-electric.com.au

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PCPP

**POWER
VALUE
EXTRAS**



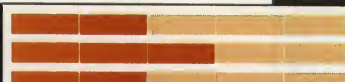
PCPP

**POWER
VALUE
EXTRAS**



BCPD

**POWER
VALUE
EXTRAS**



SONY FD TRINITRON E220

Quite simply, this monitor gave the most beautiful picture of any in the PowerTest. Colours were rich, images were sharp and no matter which resolution you choose text is clear and easy to read.

The controls are idiosyncratic but still very functional and the amount of customisation and tweaking available is second to none. Put simply, we love this monitor. It looks good, performs well and it's built with exacting attention to detail by the inventors of both aperture grille and flat screen CRT technology. Of course, the real disadvantage of buying Sony is that famous Sony Tax. There's no real sensible reason why this monitor has to cost \$50 more than the nearest (also somewhat overpriced) competing display.

However, the plain fact of the matter is that you can't go past this monitor for quality and performance. Hit your local systems integrator, use all your charm to lower the price, and then walk away with the best 17 inch display money can buy.



NEAR MISSES...

PHILIPS 107T

For those who object to paying the aforementioned Sony Tax, the Philips 107T should be the very next monitor on your shopping list. With a true flat screen, brilliant colour, precise geometry and the shortest CRT tube on the block, the 107T excels in many areas. Colour depth and richness is slightly less than the Sony, but the inbuilt LightFrame technology enhances colour and brightness for the watching of DVD and the viewing of personal intimate photographs in the privacy of your own pressed-for-space apartment.



LG FLATRON 795FT

Cruelly denied the Value award by a young upstart who came into the office at the last moment (*He means the Samsung 753DF - Ed*) the LG Flatron 795FT is nevertheless an excellent monitor, and if you have the extra \$120, more than worth consideration. With

exemplary image clarity thanks to its lower dot pitch and three-layer flatness, the LG Flatron wipes the floor with offerings from Acer and Mitsubishi and any discerning gamer should feel no qualms about offering the 795FT pride of place next to their Big Biege Box.



HITACHI CM615

Okay so it got the lowest score in the PowerTest, so what's it doing here in the Near Misses box? Well the simple fact is that the Hitachi CM615 is cheap, reliable and gives a decent image. If you are one of the small and slightly strange group of people who say crazy stuff like "I just need something that displays graphics, I don't need flat aperture dot pitch rubbish, just give me a screen" then this little Hitachi is probably the monitor for you. If you don't have high expectations of it, then it's unlikely to let you down.



SAMSUNG 753DF

The Samsung came into the PC PowerPlay Tech Bunker at the last possible moment to be part of this PowerTest, but thankfully this monitor turned out to be more than worth the wait.

Basically, the 753DF offers the spec and the flat screen goodness of many of the professional models, and is priced down around the area of the very modest Hitachi CM615. With a dot pitch of 0.25, a maximum resolution of 1280x1024 @ 60Hz and a relatively trim housing, the 753DF fits in well and has it where it counts; image reproduction is of a particularly high quality for such a cheap monitor. However, to be honest it's only the extremely low price versus fairly good performance that

really cements its position as the king of the value screens, since the Flatron has a markedly better image and the Hitachi is crucially cheaper, although a far inferior display.



Hotware Reviews

MICROTECH

MAVERICK 1.33GHZ GAMES PC

DISTRIBUTOR Microtech 02 9648 1818 PRICE \$5495 URL www.techbuy.com.au

For the hard core gamer who must have absolutely everything and damn the price, Microtech has built a machine which not only closely matches the PCPP Beast in specifications, but also comes in below the magical \$6000 mark. Sit down, strap in and prepare for the most intense gaming experience of your young life.

Built around a winning combination of the ASUS A7M266 motherboard and an Athlon 1.33GHz processor, Microtech's Maverick PC is all about attention to detail. The process of review here in the PCPP Tech Bunker involves immediately ripping the side of the case off and visually confirming that all the bits the manufacturer boasts are indeed inside. When we opened up the Maverick we were immediately impressed by the build quality. Every cable was securely bundled out of harm's way, even down to the leads from cooling fans, which were tucked in against the motherboard. The power cords to the drives, normally a kraken-like tangle of wild tentacles, were all bundled together into a single thick line which was

COOL CUSTOMER

Another area in which the Maverick excels is in cooling. Microtech has taken attention to detail to its logical extreme and provided two extra cooling devices on top of the usual CPU fan and case fans. For added stability and overclocking potential, a Thermalright Blue ORB chipset cooler is glued to the motherboard, and a PCI cooler is slotted into a vacant space immediately below the videocard, blowing cool refreshing air over the toasty GeForce2 Ultra chip. Apart from creating a very stable machine, this extra cooling is just further evidence of Microtech's sheer worthiness as the manufacturer of your Beast.



7,200rpm hard drives in a RAID array as one 60Gb monster, everything about the Maverick shouts "Look at me!"

With a spec like this, it should come as no surprise that this is the most powerful PC we've

SYSTEM SPECS

- **PROCESSOR** AMD Athlon 1.33GHz
- **RAM** 256Mb Hyundai PC2100 RAM
- **MOTHERBOARD** ASUS A7M266
- **VIDEO** Hercules 3D Prophet II Ultra
- **OPTICAL** LG 12xDVD, Ricoh 8x8x32 CD-writer
- **STORAGE** 2x30Gb IBM Deskstar 7,200rpm HDD
- **MODEM** Swann Smart 56k
- **MONITOR** 17" LG Flatron 1280x1024 @ 60Hz
- **EXPANSION** 5 x PCI, 1 x AGP, 2 x USB, 2 x serial, 1 x parallel
- **EXTRA** Mobo chipset cooler, PCI slot cooler, Promise IDE ATA/100 RAID 0/1 controller, BroMax 10/100 network card, Windows 98SE

amount of trendy blue styling to create a personal computer ensemble that's uniquely you... or something.

Of course this wouldn't be a review without a few niggles, and the Maverick does indeed fall just a few tiny points short of perfect. For instance, as last month's PowerTest indicates, we would have preferred to see a Hercules Gametheater XP soundcard instead of the SoundBlaster Live!, although the Live!Drive does, we must admit, look very fine in the front of the case. Also, the 8x Ricoh CD-writer is a bit of a disappointment, as a 12x or even 16x burner would have made the business of... er... backing up important software all the easier.

Finally though, only including a 17" monitor is a bit of a blow for gamers who like to see everything up there on the big, big screen. However, we must confess that it's sort of our fault; we asked Microtech to supply the LG monitor for our PowerTest.

Fortunately, because Microtech is a systems integrator rather than a huge

faceless multinational, it's no problem for them to replace any component of the Maverick with something more to your taste.

However, the bottom line is that the Microtech Maverick 1.33 is now the gaming system to beat. Add a 21" monitor and a set of Boston speakers, and it will give even the mighty Beast a serious run for its money.

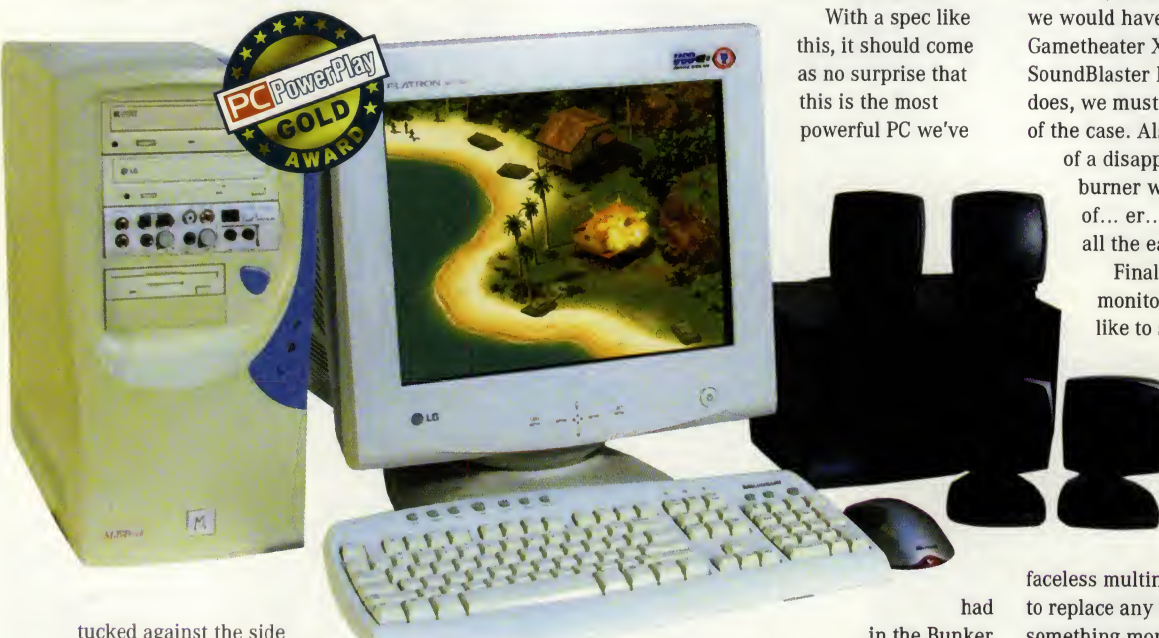
Anthony Fordham

tucked against the side of the case. Not only does this look good, it maximises the effect of the various cooling devices Microtech has included (see Cool Customer).

Quite simply, this system is what all other systems integrators who offer a gaming package should look to for a standard. With 256Mb of Hyundai DDR RAM, Windows 98SE, an optical mouse, a CD writer as well as 12x DVD, a Soundblaster Live! Platinum 5.1, a 3D Prophet II Ultra, even down to running the two 30Gb

had in the Bunker to date, posting a very impressive 3DMark2000 score of 5195 at 1280x1024x32, and a Quake3 Arena result of 85.2 FPS at the same resolution.

And this machine is ready and raring for any task you care to throw at it. The GeForce2 Ultra takes care of games. The CD-writer takes care of MP3s, and the BroMax 10/100 ethernet controller takes care of those clowns at the local LAN. And it's all packed into a very attractive AOpen ATX midtower case, with just the right



PCPP

With nearly identical spec to The Beast, the Maverick is a 'real world' solution for the hard core gamer...

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AMD

ATHLON 1.33GHZ

DISTRIBUTOR Aus PC Market PRICE \$550 URL www.auspcmarket.com.au

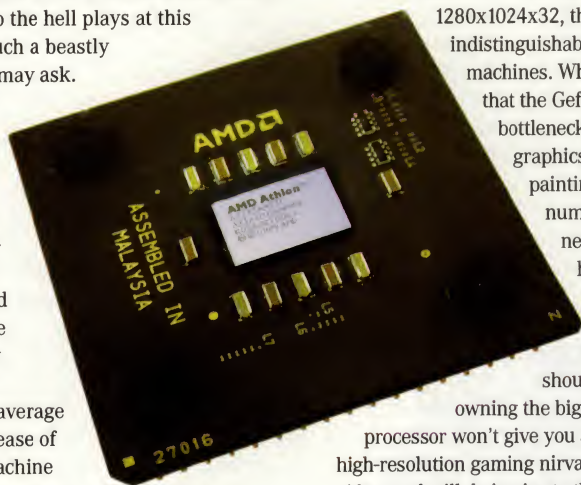
Since its appearance in the marketplace many moons ago, the Athlon processor has undergone many alterations. Recently, the Athlon has been further enhanced with a beefy increase in front side bus from 100MHz up to 133MHz which is effectively 266MHz due to the Double Data EV6 design. Sporting the new enhancement and at an impressive clock speed is the Athlon 1.33GHz processor.

Having said that, all the modifications made on the Athlon have only involved improvements in the various clock speeds while the architecture has remained relatively unchanged. In comparison to the Pentium 4, it may seem lacklustre, ordinary and unexciting. What the Athlon 1.33GHz processor does have in its favour is the ability to perform close to its full potential without the need for specially optimised software. AMD has designed the processor with today's applications in mind so whether software is optimised or not, the Athlon processor will continue to perform admirably.

After many vigorous tests, it is clear the processor can romp through any application with little effort. Its blistering performance is evident in Quake3 at low resolutions. Tests at 640x480x16 returned a colossal score of 158.4 frames-per-second compared to a less outstanding figure of 119.8 on an Athlon 1GHz processor. "Who the hell plays at this resolution on such a beastly machine?" you may ask.

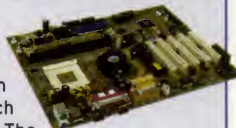
Well nobody really except intolerant money-smoking cyber-athletes (*Who? - Ed*), however it does give a good indication of the processor's raw speed. At this resolution, the average frame rate increase of the 1.33GHz machine over the 1GHz system is roughly one-third. What is really surprising though is the fact that the 1.33GHz Athlon also has an exact clock speed advantage of one-third.

It doesn't seem very logical that these results are obtained given that the CPU is not the only part restricting frame rates in gameplay. Consideration must also be given to the restrictions imposed by the hard drive speed, amount of memory available, the graphics card, front side bus speed... Oh wait a moment... did



UPGRADE YOUR MOTHER?

The next generation Athlon processors (aka Athlon-Cs) are designed to be used in conjunction with motherboards which support a 266MHz FSB. The VIA KT133A and the AMD 761 chipsets are the two most popularly used. Motherboards based on the KT133A chipset are for SDRAM only. Those more inclined to head down the DDR path may wish to invest in board using the AMD 761 chipset. Owners of old KT133 boards may be disappointed to hear that a motherboard upgrade is mandatory for those wishing to take full advantage of these next generation Athlons. Running the new processors can still be achieved with a multiplier unlocked CPU and multiplier manipulation capable motherboard. An example is a 1.2 GHz Athlon-C processor that usually runs with a FSB of 133MHz and a multiplier of 9. By setting the FSB to 100MHz and then changing the multiplier to 12 a clock speed of 1.2GHz can be achieved (100x12 = 1200 MHz). However there are no benefits - just pick yourself up a vanilla Athlon.



we just mention FSB speed? The new Athlon does have an improved FSB of 266MHz; a 66MHz increase over the older 200MHz bus.

Bumping up the resolution and colour depth in Quake3 sees the speed advantage of the Athlon 1.33GHz gradually diminish. At 1280x1024x32, the game is visually indistinguishable on the two different machines. What's happening here is that the Geforce2 is becoming the bottleneck of the system. As the graphics card lumbers through painting the enormous number of polygons needed in each and every high-resolution frame, the processor is forced to wait patiently. Gamers should be aware that owning the biggest and most beastly processor won't give you a one-way ticket to high-resolution gaming nirvana. Only a high-end video card will do justice to the Athlon 1.33GHz.

The 3DMARK 2000 benchmark is very graphics intensive and returned quite predictable results for the two machines. As expected, the 1.33GHz chip performed commendably.

Overclocking enthusiasts may be pleased to hear that despite its whopping clock speed, the Athlon 1.33GHz processor can still be overclocked. The factory-unlocked chip we were given for the review had no problems reaching 1.46GHz at the default voltage of 1.75V. For

BENCHMARKS

TEST MACHINE GlobalWin FOP38, MSI K7T Turbo (KT133A), 128Mb PC133 SDRAM, 32Mb Asus V7700 Geforce 2 GTS, Win98 SE.

QUAKE 3 ARENA 640x480x16 bit colour

ATHLON 1GHZ 119.8

ATHLON C 1.33GHZ 158.4

QUAKE 3 ARENA 1280x1024x32 bit colour

ATHLON 1GHZ 58.5

ATHLON C 1.33GHZ 60.2

3DMARK2000 1024x786x32 bit colour

ATHLON 1GHZ 4608

ATHLON C 1.33GHZ 4952

those new to overclocking, voltage tweaking may allow your processor to reach otherwise unobtainable speeds. By pushing up the core voltage, higher clock speeds and greater stability can be achieved. The results are very impressive considering my own Duron system has 1.92V being pumped through it, yielding only an extra 125MHz. We were so impressed by the 1.33's overclocking potential that when it came to sending it back, we almost instinctively slipped my Duron chip into the padded envelope.

Fans of the silent life can also rejoice. Never once did the processor run hotter than 50 degrees Celsius in any of our tests. So you can finally do away with your noisy GlobalWin FOP38 CPU cooler while having enough power to cut through the most demanding applications.

At the time of writing, Athlon 1.33GHz CPUs are selling for around the AU\$550 mark. This is of course far cheaper than a Pentium 4 at a similar clock speed, and for gamers, the performance of the chip is far superior. Couple this monster with DDR memory as well as a high-end video card and what you will have is a formidable machine in anyone's language. Viva AMD!

A special thanks to Computer & Parts Land of Melbourne for supplying the motherboard and other goodies to make this review possible.

Michael Wu

PCPP

No fancy "Hyper Pipeline" or "NetBurst" technology, just sheer grunt. And it's grunt you can actually afford!

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DELL

DIMENSION 8100

DISTRIBUTOR Dell Australia 1800 812 393 **PRICE** \$4199 **URL** www.dell.com.au

The Dimension 8100 is Dell's flagship performance system, packed with chunky features designed to entice and ensnare the wealthy gamer who simply must have everything. This is a premium machine and comes at a premium price, so assuming you have a fat wad to flash around and don't mind how much you spend as long as you get a super complete system, does the Dimension 8100 deliver? Mostly.

Running the show is the hugely powerful and hugely expensive Pentium 4 1.5GHz CPU. One thing every gaming mag seems to agree on is that while the P4 will certainly improve framerates in Quake3, its performance over Athlon 1.1GHz and 1.2GHz processors is not significant enough to warrant the much higher price. And in fact, in many games, the P4 still lags behind AMD-based machines.

A critical mistake so many manufacturers are making these days is spending big on peripherals and failing to supply gamers with 256Mb of memory. By using a P4 system, Dell is of course required to use RAMBUS memory, which is still much more expensive than even DDR SDRAM. To this end, the Dimension 8100 only has 128Mb of memory. Of course, this is plentiful for most games, but when we upgraded this machine to use the two 128Mb RAMBUS modules we had in the office, we found Windows just that much sweeter to get about in, and load times were slightly but noticeably reduced.

A dark rider on a pale OS

Speaking of Windows, Dell like so many others has shipped the PC with Windows Me. Fortunately the system can be configured at the Dell website to include Windows 2000 Professional, although of course this does raise the price slightly.

Graphics are handled by a GeForce2 Ultra. This card is specially built for Dell, but is very similar to offerings from Creative, and returned a very strong 3DMark2000 score of 4603 at 1280x1024x32. This is a lot slower than the Microtech system, but still more than adequate for smooth gameplay at high resolutions.

The hard drive is a Western Digital 7,200rpm model weighing in at 40Gb which is a very generous amount of space. A 12x DVD is also included, along with a 8x CD Writer, so indeed the Dimension 8100 is a very complete system.

Rather than the ubiquitous SB Live!, Dell has gone with a Turtle Beach Santa Cruz soundcard, which is sold in Australia under the name of Videologic's Sonic Fury. As last month's PowerTest found, the Santa Cruz is a capable card indeed, and 5.1 channel support ensures DVD playback is as aurally stimulating as it is visually. Of interest is the VersaJack input/output on the card, which allows connectivity with everything from coaxial digital out to headphones, mic and various other inputs. Unfortunately the card has no optical ports, so unlike the SB Live! Platinum, a direct optical digital connection with speakers or recording source is not possible.

The monitor supplied with the system is a Dell 19" model, which is actually a rebadged Sony Trinitron tube, so image reproduction is nothing short of excellent. In fact this is probably the system's strongest point; with such a high quality monitor, resolutions of 1600x1200x32 are supported, and it's possible to really get the most out of the GeForce2 Ultra videocard.

Peering around the side of the case, we find a built-in 10/100 Ethernet port, so it's simplicity itself to get this baby on the LAN. Also, four USB ports are supplied over the usual two, allowing for just that extra bit of welcome expansion. One irritation in system construction is Dell's

MAY THX FORCE BE WITH YOU

The Dell Dimension 8100 is one of the first PCs to offer Lucasfilm's THX audio certification. According to the marketeers, THX on PC enables users to enjoy the peace of mind that comes with knowing that every piece of hardware is fully compatible with every other piece of hardware, and includes software to make setup easier. Well frankly setup wasn't any more complicated or simple than usual, but the four-channel Harman Kardon speakers provided with the system were very beefy indeed. Still, there really aren't enough acronyms in PC technology today, so it's great to welcome another one. THX forever!

SYSTEM SPECS

■ PROCESSOR	Pentium 4 1.5GHz
■ RAM	128Mb RAMBUS
■ MOTHERBOARD	Dell Bespoke
■ VIDEO	nVidia GeForce2 Ultra
■ OPTICAL	12xDVD, 12xCD-RW
■ STORAGE	40Gb HDD
■ MODEM	56k PCI
■ MONITOR	19" Trinitron 1600x1200 @ 75Hz
■ EXPANSION	Onboard ethernet, 4x USB, 5x PCI, 1x AGP, 2x serial, 1x parallel

decision to mount the CD-writer above the DVD-ROM, which means you will often accidentally load a data CD into the writer rather than the DVD. This only becomes irritating when trying to copy files off a CD onto the hard drive, as the CD-writer is exceptionally slow at this, taking the best part of four minutes to copy a 40Mb file! If you remember to only load CDs into the DVD, then everything works just fine. And of course, it's simplicity itself to just swap the drives over when you get the machine home.

The Dimension 8100 has been around for a while, but this latest update takes advantage of Intel's latest P4 processor and includes a GeForce2 Ultra videocard making it a very able system for gaming. And with a DVD and CD-writer, the system also has many other uses. At \$4200 it is more expensive than if you put a system of similar specification together yourself, but the peace of mind that comes from knowing if the system doesn't work out of the box you can send it back for a replacement is surely worth a few dollars.

However Athlon based PCs still win for games performance, so unless your system has to have Intel Inside, it might be best to look elsewhere.

Anthony Fordham



PCPP

An able but unspectacular system. P4 CPU takes the edge off game performance, but a GF2 Ultra is a welcome addition

72

Are your balls as big as your ears?



ACS 45.2 Powercube

Three piece speaker system delivering high quality audio for music, games and PC entertainment. Includes two 3 inch, full range satellites and a 20 watt wooden subwoofer for more bass power. Electronic volume control adjusts satellites and subwoofer simultaneously. RRP \$199

ATP3 - 3 Piece System

High performance 3 piece system featuring two dynamic microdrivers in each satellite, delivering all the power and performance of a larger speaker. Speakers are magnetically shielded to prevent monitor interference. Powered wooden subwoofer extends the bass power. RRP \$199



ACS 56 Powerplay Plus

70 Watts of 4-channel gaming output adds excitement and surround sound. Compatible with all stereo sound cards - use with 3D positional audio sound cards for optimum performance. Digital control for master, surround, bass and treble levels with LED display. Powered 6 inch wooden subwoofer adds dynamic bass response. RRP \$349



ATP 5 - 5 Piece System

The ATP 5 uses advanced technology microdrivers to deliver 80 watts of 4-channel gaming output. This five piece system dramatically enhances PC audio. The wooden subwoofer adds power and low frequency realism. Digital control for master, surround, bass and treble with LED indicators. RRP \$399



VIA

C3 PROCESSOR

DISTRIBUTOR VIA Technologies PRICE \$TBA URL www.viatech.com

The first generation C3 processor was based around the Samuel core and arrived in April 2000. Many of you may have never heard of the C3 and you can be rightly excused. It won little publicity and its availability could be described as limited to say the least. The Samuel 1 performed dismally due to a complete lack of L2 cache and forced VIA back to the drawing board.

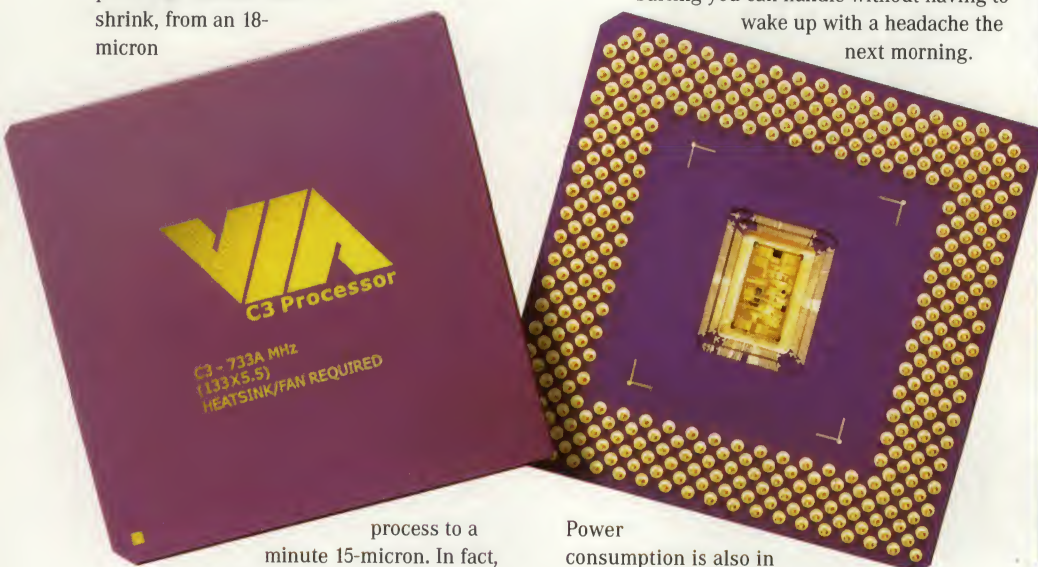
The company has since returned with a new C3 processor based around the Samuel 2 core. Only minor alterations have been made, but enough to suggest that VIA is heading in the right direction. Firstly, the amount of L2 cache has been raised from 0k to 64k. Combined with the original 128k of L1 cache, it raises the total amount of cache to a respectable 192k. The additional cache gives the new C3 a sizeable advantage over its predecessor. Secondly, the processor has also had a die shrink, from an 18-micron

At high resolution, the difference is less noticeable as the Geforce2 MX becomes the system's bottleneck. Of course we could have used a big, bad, bustling Geforce2 Ultra and told you that the C3 can generate tremendous frame rates at even the highest resolutions, but there is no hiding it - the C3 simply does not cut the mustard when it comes to 3D gaming.

Don't sweat it

However, the C3 is very competent at just about anything else. The new 15-micron process means the C3 runs very cool. So cool that we completed all testing with our GlobalWin FOP38 cooler unplugged. That's right, only a good quality heatsink is needed so you won't ever have to deal with the high pitched whining from your monstrous CPU cooler again. That means you'll be able to have all the late night web

surfing you can handle without having to wake up with a headache the next morning.



process to a minute 15-micron. In fact, this makes the new C3 the first x86 processor with a 15-micron process! Along with both MMX and 3DNow! multimedia instructions, the new Samuel 2 looks good on paper but does it really perform up to expectations?

By now you have probably already peered at the benchmark results. And yes, in contrast with the AMD Duron, its 3D gaming performance is comparatively poor. So what is letting the C3 down?

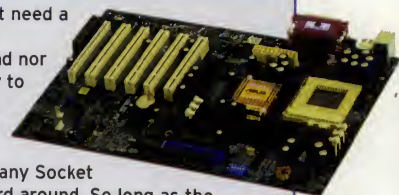
For many years now, Cyrix has had inferior floating-point performance. It's the driving force in 3D applications and with an underpowered floating-point unit, lower frame rates are to be expected. Quake 3 at low resolution tells the story as it is; the C3 FPU simply lacks the grunt of the Duron and subsequently gets thrashed in the benchmark.

Power consumption is also in favour of the C3. At 700MHz, the processor only uses 5W of power which even beats some of the most power consuming mobile processors. And it's also cheap. Though not much cheaper than equivalent Durons, there is no need to purchase a beefy heatsink/fan combo or an expensive KT133A motherboard. And with the small but still important (every penny counts, right?) amount of money saved on the electricity bill, the C3 saves you even more in the long run.

All of these advantages make the C3 an excellent choice for a second non-gaming PC. Use it as a low cost FTP or MP3 server without the unbearable 6800rpm fan and the expensive power costs. Alternatively, it can be used in an Internet terminal, workstation, or homework cruncher. The possibilities are endless for this

SOCKET TO ME! BWAHA...

The C3 does not need a completely new motherboard and nor is it compulsory to have one with a VIA chipset. It is compatible with just about any Socket 370 motherboard around. So long as the board has the frequencies, multipliers and voltage settings to support the processor it should work perfectly fine. It may also be a good idea to flash the BIOS with the newest version before installing the C3. For the paranoid, the VIA webpage has a list of recommended motherboards.

**BENCHMARKS**

TEST MACHINE Cyrix III 733MHz, Gigabyte GA-6VX7-4X, 128Mb PC133 SDRAM, 32Mb Smartview Geforce2 MX, Win98 SE.

QUAKE 3 ARENA 640x480x16 bit colour

C3 733MHZ 54.1

DURON 700MHZ 95.8

QUAKE 3 ARENA 1280x1024x32 bit colour

C3 733MHZ 44.3

DURON 700MHZ 58.4

3DMARK2000 1024x786x32 bit colour

C3 700MHZ 2815

DURON 700MHZ 3137

versatile processor... as long as those endless possibilities don't include games.

Designed with the budget Internet/workstation PC market in mind, the new C3 is not an effective gaming processor and nor is it trying to be. Its competent business performance along with the silent and cost effective design makes it a good choice for a no-frills system. However with the poor FPU performance, it is impossible to recommend the C3 for any gaming purposes.

Michael Wu

PCPP

Strongest showing yet from Cyrix, but lack-lustre floating-point performance makes it unsuitable for games...

68

SAITEK

X36F JOYSTICK AND X35T THROTTLE

DISTRIBUTOR Microtech **PRICE** \$133 **URL** www.techbuy.com.au

As far as joysticks go, this is perhaps the best thing since sliced bread. Sure to take some of the wind out of the sails of industry giants Thrustmaster and Microsoft, Saitek has produced the X36F & X35T, an almost faultless combination of functionality and customisation. Plus they handle like no-one's business.

The Flight Simulator 2000 test showed the combination of this joystick and throttle to offer superior control. The joystick is responsive and feels nice with its black rubber trim. Friction can be adjusted on the throttle if necessary. Both of these babies are BIG and occupy some serious desk space. The trade-off is that they are solid and won't move

around to any great degree, making the suction cups unnecessary (which is good because they're notorious for not sticking).

The joystick features a staggering 42 assignable functions. These include the fire trigger, a second fire and A & B buttons. There are two hat switches, a launch button and a pinkie switch. The launch button is a safety prepared fire button. When you need to fire it, you flip the button down and take your shot. The pinkie switch allows switching to a second control configuration for all of the buttons. The joystick doesn't have a twisting axis for rudder control, but a convenient left and right rudder control on the throttle means this isn't an issue. The functions are numerous enough to allow complete

freedom from the keyboard. A GUI program is included that allows the mapping of individual controls in DOS and Windows. There are over 20 pre-programmed and custom set-ups for the most popular flight sims and more can be downloaded from the Saitek website. You can even create a set-up of your own from the ground up. You can also enter all of the commands featured in a game, then assign commands from that list. A nice option indeed.

The USB model joystick is super easy to set up. Some valid complaints are that the joystick is just too damn big for small hands and the fact that the joystick on its own lacks a twist-axis throttle and hence some basic functionality. But together the X36F and X35T are a complete package for your flight control needs. Come fly the Saitek skies and never use a keyboard again.

John Dewhurst



PCPP

Flexible and versatile, the X36F & X35T make the complete package for any serious flight sim gamer!

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ASUS

CUSL2-C SPECIAL EDITION

DISTRIBUTOR Achieva **PRICE** \$280 **URL** www.achieva.com.au

The ASUS CUSL2-C SE is a special release of the venerable CUSL2-C Socket 370 motherboard. It's full title is the CUSL2-C Black Pearl Special Edition.

The original CUSL2 was a great motherboard, fully featured in typical ASUS style, and is now a firm favourite with a great many gamers. ASUS has re-released this motherboard, now turning its guns solely on the performance / tweeker market. Without beating around the bush, this motherboard looks amazing! The suave black PCB will have everyone at the next LAN looking twice. The once green heatsink has been replaced with a rather natty gold one. Imagine your CPU with a Golden orb housed next to that lovely golden heatsink. This is the point that will have most mad case modders drooling. For pure cool factor you cannot go past it.

Other new features include built in support for smart cards and flash media. This apparently has security applications, (total control freaks pay attention here - if this were inside your PC you probably wouldn't want anyone messing with it either!). Another

interesting feature is inclusion of the ability to make custom bios images. Which means you will never have to look at that ugly black screen during bios load up, you can replace it with you most recent picture off the umm... NASA web site. This alone makes the CUSL2-C SE an interesting option.

Unfortunately ASUS really hasn't done much more than that to this motherboard. The sole selling point with this motherboard is that it's a special edition. Yes it's an ASUS, and yes it's also on a black PCB, but there doesn't seem like there are enough reasons for the average user to want to make an incremental upgrade on the basis of features. It certainly will appeal to most hard core users just on the basis of the 'Special Edition' tag. This is the first ASUS special edition motherboard, and to be honest



it's a shame ASUS hasn't performed the same makeover for the A7V133, or another of the Socket A boards. And while it is not a bad motherboard, quite the opposite in fact, it does seem a little bit superfluous.

Nathanael Jeanneret

PCPP

One for the neon case light community, but not enough features to make a worthwhile upgrade or a standout product

73

PANASONIC

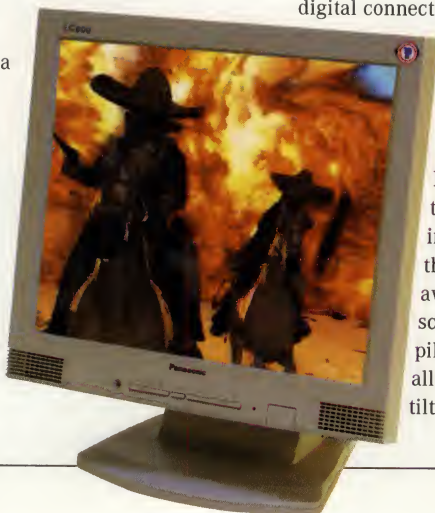
LC90S 19" LCD MONITOR

DISTRIBUTOR Panasonic **PRICE** \$6800 **URL** www.panasonic.com.au

It's difficult not to become instantly seduced by a big LCD monitor. So much screen real estate, in such a small space. Flicker-free, easy on the eyes, and possessed of that holy sort of goodness that only really high hi tech can provide. But it's important to try and stay cool and detached; this thing is worth \$6800 remember. And Panasonic's LC90S is definitely not perfect.

Considering that for \$6800 you could pick up Microtech's Maverick games PC (reviewed page 94) and throw in a Philips 201P 21" monitor, the LC90S needs to be a very impressive piece of equipment indeed.

It all starts off admirably, with a generous 19" viewable area, plugs for two PCs, a USB hub and a maximum resolution of 1280x1024 @ 75Hz.



However, then for some reason Panasonic decided to include a pair of awful tinny little speakers and turn the LC90S into a multimedia monitor, which is the kind of thing that budget home users get excited about, and remains of absolutely no use to gamers.

Probably the craziest thing about this monitor is the lack of digital input. Many cards, including the 3D Prophet II Ultra and the 3D Prophet III, include DVI outputs for direct digital connection to an LCD screen. This

cuts out the redundant digit/analogue and analogue/digital conversions that occur if an analogue signal is fed into a digital LCD monitor. Unfortunately, the LC90S doesn't have a DVI input. Also, all the ports for the monitor are very awkwardly located behind the screen, up where the support pillar joins the hinge that allows for forward/backward tilt. Connecting the monitor to

the PC required some less than delicate handling, which is precisely the kind of thing you don't want to do with a 19" LCD monitor.

Finally though, the picture quality of the monitor was simply not particularly spectacular, and at this price, it had to be spectacular to warrant recommendation. There was considerable blur in 3D games, and for low-resolution 2D titles such as Diablo2, the picture was very grainy, although colour reproduction was very good.

If the LC90S was priced like conventional CRT monitors, which is impossible given the extremely expensive LCD technology, it would be a worthy if somewhat flawed contender. But at a stratospheric \$6800, it is simply not worth the investment. Leave it for the CAD-heads and magazine art designers. Gamers should look elsewhere.

Jack Kulyk

PCPP

Big, bright, but not a really impressive performer, and the \$6800 price tag leads us to cry, "Tell 'em they're dreaming!"

54

CREATIVE

DTT350 DESKTOP THEATER 5.1

DISTRIBUTOR Creative Labs 02 9666 6100 **PRICE** \$899 **URL** www.australia.creative.com

Digital home theater speaker systems are still relatively new to PC enthusiasts, and remained largely irrelevant until the recent introduction of 5.1 channel soundcards. Since then though, we have encountered 5.1 speaker packages at two main price points; quite simply above \$1000 and below \$1000. At over \$1000, it is natural to expect nothing but the best, a speaker system that can take care off all your hi-fi and digital needs. However, at a much more reasonable \$899, the Creative DTT3500, while not all things to all audio sources, is nevertheless an impressive package.

The DTT3500 competes directly with Yamaha's TSS-1 5.1 system (reviewed PCPP#60) to provide a 5.1 channel solution specifically for your PC. The main difference between these two systems and the higher end packages such as the Boston DT6000 is the lack of a second analogue input for a source such as a hi-fi stereo or CD player. However, like the TSS-1, the DTT3500 does have digital inputs both optical and coax for such heinous devices as the PS2, as well as more admirable tools such as the redoubtable minidisc recorder.

Break it down

The DTT3500 has seven separate parts; four satellite speakers, a slightly larger centre channel, a hefty subwoofer and a amplifier/decoder module with all of the volume and source selector controls. There's also a small remote which duplicates all the controls. One nice little touch is the powered servo in the main volume knob, so when the volume is changed, the backlit dial rotates *as if by magic!* Okay, so we're easily impressed.

The DTT3500 includes a lot of cabling, with 3m cables for the front speakers and 5m cables for the rear, so a proper surround-sound configuration can be set up in all but the insanely largest of rooms. Creative also includes an optical cable, which is a friendly touch, since these cables retail at anywhere from \$30 to \$40 on the open market.

Taking a look at the rear of the control module, we find outputs for the five speakers. Even though at the speaker end the wire ends in two uninsulated strands, like all good hi fi equipment, the module-end of the speaker cable has an RCA plug on it, which keeps everything neat and tidy behind the module. As for inputs, there are two

analogue 1/8 inch plugs for front and surround, as well as coax and optical digital inputs. There's also a digital DIN adaptor, which is specifically designed to take advantage of support from the SB Live! Platinum 5.1 soundcard.

Live and living in leather

Which is a major point of interest for this system; those users who already have SB Live! cards will get extra functionality out of the setup, with support for all sorts of multispeaker effects such as a different ambience settings, which helps enhance the DVD experience. This is not to say that users without SB Live! cards are disadvantaged as such; they'll just miss out on a few of the extras.

Like the Boston DT6000, the DTT3500 doesn't support DTS decoding, but it does provide support for both Dolby Pro Logic and Dolby Digital, so pretty much any DVD you play through it will be able to show off all the surround effects included.



However, features aside, a speaker system lives and dies on the performance of its actual speakers. The earlier model, the DTT2500, was criticised for having a fairly lack-lustre centre channel and an inadequate subwoofer. Creative has addressed this, not by increasing the power of the centre speaker, but by instead increasing its physical size, which produces more volume. Also, the subwoofer has been beefed up to a 30 watt beastie.

We haven't tested the older DTT2500, but all we can say is that if the DTT3500 represents an improvement, the DTT2500 must have been a very unimpressive unit indeed. This newer system isn't bad at all, but there is a real lack of punch to the audio quality, with serious amounts of signal loss in the mid-range, resulting in a very contrasty sound that alternates quite rudely between super loud and super quiet.

GIMMICKSVILLE REVISITED

Presumably in an effort to make the system more versatile and suited for the exciting modernity of 21st Century singles living, the DTT3500's amp can be posed either upright or prone, just like a PS2. And like the PS2's Amazing Rotatable PlayStation Symbol, the DTT3500 comes with a selection of different fascias so all the little labels for your various volume knobs stay the right way up. Also, different finishes are supplied to meet the exacting stylistic needs of your funky inner city pad. It's the little details that really make a package, don't you think?



Peace and quiet

For games, the DTT3500 performed admirably; our tests in Quake3 and Undying returned impressive results, especially with the system's in-built support for EAX effects, which in Undying particularly brought added texture to the game. However, at higher volumes there was some quite noticeable distortion and significant loss of clarity, so moderate output is the order of the day, for which your neighbours may unknowingly thank Creative. We test our 5.1 speakers not only with a PC, but also through a Pioneer DVD player while attached to a Yamaha AX592 stereo amplifier and a pair of very hefty B&W 603 Series 2 speakers and 5m lengths of Monster Z1 cabling. First, we used the

DTT3500 with the B&W speakers turned off, then compared the sound with the B&W's activated. This allowed us to really appreciate exactly how much mid-range sound is lost.

Of course, the B&W speakers are worth \$1700 each, and the DTT3500 slips in at a buck less than \$900. Still, \$900 is a significant wad of cash, only a day's wage off the price of a GeForce2 Ultra. The bottom line here, as it seems to be with so many Creative products these days, is that the performance of the DTT3500 is matched by a similar product retailing at a much lower price point, in this case the Yamaha TSS-1 at \$499.

Jack Kulyk

PCPP

A fully-featured package with extra support for SB Live! owners. However, not a patch on the Yamaha TSS-1!

66

Hotware Reviews

CREATIVE

SOUNDWORKS SLIM 500

DISTRIBUTOR Creative Labs 02 9666 6100 **PRICE** \$299 **URL** www.australia.creative.com

Budget conscious PC users have more options than ever, with the market now alive with mid-priced speakers. The Philips MMS 305/A, one of the speaker systems in last month's Hotware Reviews, is one example of a good speaker system aimed squarely at the noggin of the games individual. The Cambridge SoundWorks Slim 500 is another, offering a more basic set-up, at a cheaper price.

The Slim 500 is a three-speaker system, featuring left and right satellites and a sub-woofer. It doesn't feature the two extra surround speakers, that are positioned behind the gamer, for that atmospheric surround quality. Further, there is (obviously) no support for 5.1 Surround that is the domain of the DVD. This system is definitely for the PC user who wants a basic but decent sound set-up.

This is just what the Sim 500 offers. The sound from the two satellites is clear and powerful, with a good dynamic range and fearsome presence. The slim panel speakers,

though small, produce a dense sound and are more than enough for the average PC. An interesting quality is the blurring of location in the sound. I found that I "heard" the speakers half a foot back from where they actually were - quite impressive.

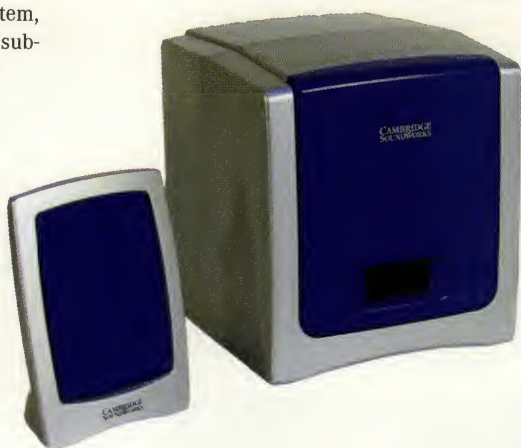
The sub-woofer however is less exciting. The sound is not bad but in comparison with the two satellites, the

sub-woofer places a distinct third. There is no floor-shaking rumble and that's what the sub-woofer is all about. Its light weight (no pun intended) is a fair indication of its lack of balls. Balancing is also an issue since the sub-woofer is easily drowned out by the other speakers - and there's only one all-purpose volume control.

However for this price, you could hardly expect much more and the sound that you do get overall is really very good. This is one for those readers desperate for sound but unwilling (or unable) to pay the higher price of other

systems. Certainly a competent set of speakers but if you can manage a few extra dollars, the Philips MMS 305/A (\$349) or the Yamaha TSS-1 (\$499) are well worth it.

John Dewhurst



PCPP

Competent, basic speaker system for the cash-strapped. Sub-woofer is unimpressive but sound is good

70

INTEL

QX3 COMPUTER MICROSCOPE

DISTRIBUTOR Intel **PRICE** \$99.95 **URL** www.intel.com.au

You know, it looked so cool in the box. I thought "Wow! That's so cool." I took it home, eager with anticipation of having my very own microscope. And not just that, a transparent plastic blue USB microscope, which I would use to see how truly festy the mould in my bathroom has become.

Sadly though, this isn't like those old stereomicroscopes you got to play with in year 7 science, nor the real microscopes from year 9 Biology. No, it's a transparent blue plastic USB microscope, with lag time when adjusting the zoom, and 3 magnifying lenses of which, it seems, only one is of any real use.

Even at the lowest magnification (10x), it was difficult to get a clear image of anything, even John's long, luscious fingernails. The 200x is even harder to use - with grainy close ups, it's hard to distinguish any clear image.

Of all the settings, the 60x seemed to be on the money. A few of the slides given with the microscope seem designed for this setting. There's nothing like a good close look at shrimp egg or plant louse to reawaken your interest in nature.

To be fair though, it's not as if the QX3 has been designed for serious science buffs. It has a much younger age group in mind. And for this gang, it's great. Not only do they get a USB camera type thing, they get a pretty detailed editing package, designed for colour and content that kids can have fun with. Or at least, that Intel assures us kids can have fun with. See tiny things on your computer!

The microscope itself is simple to use, but this means there's not a heck of a lot you can do with the settings. No tricky knobs to turn or lights to get at the right angle - it's all built in. With the lag from movement of what you put under the lens to what you see on screen, trying to get the right view is a bit hit and miss, but with patience it's attainable.

Complete with tweezers, specimen jars and easy to follow instructions, a time-lapse function and built in stamps and borders, it's almost guaranteed to keep the young ones busy for minutes on end, until they work out how to start up another game of Soldier of Fortune.

Agata Budinska



PCPP

The appeal of 'seeing tiny things' is limited somewhat by less than spectacular performance. A good idea, though...

39

MIB

Media In Black

16X

700MB

80MIN



If you can't our black 80 Min 16X multi speed CD-R, please check them out in any good Computer Stores near you!

Warning! It is illegal to copy PS CD's



CAPAX TECHNOLOGY
UNIT 5/104A DERBY STREET, SILVERWATER NSW 2128
TEL: 02 9648 4977 FAX: 02 6848 4577

THE BEAST

THE ULTIMATE RIG

Now, word has it a lot of you are out there whinging for some kind of budget beast, a pitiful, sub-\$3000 machine that may look good in favourable light with a stiff tailwind but in reality has no chance to impress the opposite sex. This is the PCPP Beast, folks, the most powerful gaming rig sensible money can buy, built for speed, endurance and with a healthy dose of Feng-Shui. Don't dis the Beast people. Bad things happen to blasphemers.

Pioneer 16xDVD ROM & H'ware Decoder

DISTRIBUTOR Pioneer
PRICE \$549
URL www.pioneeraus.com.au

Pioneer's excellent drive will take care of all your DVD movie needs. Whether it's the calm introspection of Kriztoff Kieslowski's *Three Colours: White* or the non-stop gore-fest of Peter Jackson's *Braindead*, your viewing pleasure will remain uninterrupted by glitch, skip or irritating load-time. You also get a tasty Videologic hardware decoder for the smoothest possible shave... er... movie, and a bunch of Video Ezy vouchers.



TDK VeloCD 16x Burner

DISTRIBUTOR TDK 1800 651 917
PRICE \$599
URL www.tdk.com.au

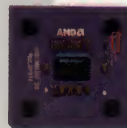


At last the mighty Yamaha has been toppled by this admittedly ugly duckling. With a brutish 16x burn rate, the TDK VeloCD makes duplicating a brace of Bros simplicity itself, and the inclusion of BURN Proof technology - a feature sorely lacking on the Yamaha - ensures not one of those valuable CDs will go to waste. Works best with Black CD 16x Media from CAPAX (02 9648 4977) which not only look the business, but are black. Black good.

AMD Athlon 1.33 GHz

DISTRIBUTOR AMD Australia
PRICE \$649
URL www.amd.com

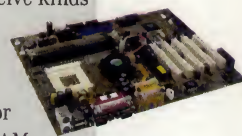
This blazing processor has the most advanced floating point unit in the world, 256k of integrated full speed L2 cache and a 200Mhz EV6 Front Side Bus. Which equals FAST. Never wait for Outlook to load again, ever. Do six things at once. Go mad, play Giants on the highest detail setting at 1600 x 1200. This thing is so powerful it's bad for you, guaranteed.



ASUS A7M266

DISTRIBUTOR Achieva 02 9742 3288
PRICE \$415
URL www.asus.com.tw

The first Athlon motherboard supporting Double Data Rate DRAM, the A7M kicked twelve kinds of Bass Avenger out of our KT133 ATV board here at PCPP. As with all ASUS components, the A7M comes loaded with extras; an AGP Pro slot for professional graphics cards, 4 DDR RAM expansion slots for memory, ATA/100 support and a host of overclocking features.



Hercules Gametheater XP

DISTRIBUTOR Guillemot 02 8303 1818

PRICE \$329

URL www.hercules.com



At last the SB Live! has been toppled. The Gametheater sounds just as good, looks ten times better, and has a fat PCI cable to make the Beast look really serious.

The rack also has four USB ports, making it a great multi-purpose hub for joysticks, digital cameras, webcams, racing wheels... hell, anything you could possibly think of. Stylish and functional. What ever will they come up with next?

256Mb DDR DRAM

DISTRIBUTOR Kingmax 02 9648 4658

PRICE \$799

URL www.kingmax.com

Once you go to 256Mb you'll never look back. You'll wonder how you ever survived with a miserable eighth of a gigabyte. This RAM is phenomenally expensive, but runs at a Double Data Rate, a blistering 266MHz. This really pumps up system performance, especially while you render a level in Q3Radiant and kick Thresh's buttocks in Quake3 at the same time.



Microsoft Intellimouse Optical

DISTRIBUTOR Microsoft 132058

PRICE \$89

URL www.microsoft.com.au



While the big silver Intellimouse Explorer certainly looks nice, we find the key word here is big. It's too big. But this little fellow is just right. An optical sensor means you'll never have to scrape that revolting black gunk off the inside ever again, and a USB connection means your lightning reflexes will now be fairly reflected in your next game of Tribes 2.

Boston Acoustics Digital Theater 6000

DISTRIBUTOR Hi Fi & Video Marketing 02 9319 6877

PRICE \$1399

URL www.bostonacoustics.com

WARNING: ensure bowel is empty before using this speaker setup. The DT6000 is so powerful it contravenes several building ordinances, and violates no less than four separate paragraphs in the Geneva Convention. Five channel surround, funky remote and optical in make this THE choice for people who can't take the pain from its oughta-be-illegal bigger brother, the DT7000.



Seagate Cheetah X15 18Gb

DISTRIBUTOR Agate Technology 02 9870 3600

PRICE \$1191

URL www.seagate.com

It's not huge, but it's the fastest hard disk on the block, consistently pulverising the competition into small, vaguely circular lumps. The X15 runs at a stupidly fast 15,000rpm and has 4Mb of cache. It's only 18Gb, but two or even three of these would allow you to save every thirty seconds in Deus Ex. Amazing.



Hercules 3D Prophet III

DISTRIBUTOR Guillemot 02 8303 1818

PRICE \$1199

URL www.hercules.com

The GeForce2 is dead. Long live the GeForce3. With its programmable pixel shader technology, 64Mb of really, really fast RAM, the fattest heat sinks in Christendom and the ability to bend an Ultra over its knee and spank it like a red-headed stepchild, the Prophet III is the new King of the Kards, and deservedly so.



Logitech Cordless Freedom Navigator

DISTRIBUTOR Logitech 02 9972 3711

PRICE \$219

URL www.logitech.com

Unchain your heart! Or at least unchain your keyboard. With all the kit the Beast includes, you'll end up with a huge ugly snarl of cables behind your desk. The Cordless Freedom Navigator eliminates at least one potential deathtrap (use your imagination) and the soft-as-silk keys make typing a 40,000 word thesis on Post-Structuralist Feminism an absolute breeze. First class honours every time! Also good for Quake3.



LianLi PC-60

DISTRIBUTOR Aust. PC Accessories 03 9763 8200

PRICE \$400

URL www.apca.net.au

A stunner. All aluminium and built to withstand a direct nuclear strike in the megaton range. As we have mentioned more than once, we even dropped this case down a flight of concrete steps and it barely flinched. Ten bays keep everything snug, three extra fans keep it cool, and slide-off covers and a motherboard tray mean it's ready for upgrade action any time.



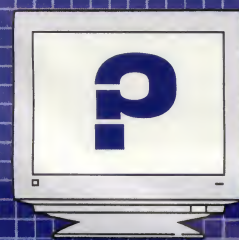
TOTAL BEAST VALUE

\$99999

SETUP

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

MATT OVERINGTON WAXES TECHNICAL



WRITE TO

SETUP

PC PowerPlay
PO BOX 634
Strawberry Hills
NSW 2016
setup@pcpowerplay.com.au

When you write remember to include as much pertinent information as possible. Send your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT and any associated *.INI files for Windows that might tell me more about your problem. Give me as detailed an explanation as you can and be sure to include as much detail as possible about your PC.

Feel free to email your questions or, if you want to snail mail, please remember to write clearly or better still print your letters. Please note that due to the volume of messages we receive, we cannot guarantee a response to all of your queries.

Q> ATA 100?

Well, I have done it. I've finally bought myself a new computer. Everything worked fine except for one slight problem. How do I use an ATA-100 hard drive? Ahem. I bought an ASUS A7V133 motherboard and it is sweet! I also bought a 20GB IDE IBM Deskstar 75GXP hard drive. It supports ATA-100, but I can't get the computer to detect it when it is plugged into the primary ATA-100 slot. It is set to primary too. Do I have to plug it into both ATA-66 and ATA-100 drive slots or what??

The hard drive works fine in ATA-66. Anyway, is ATA-100 that much better than ATA-66? and if it is, how so?

Qu@ntum

A> There is nothing magical about ATA-100 drives over ATA-33 or ATA-66 ones; they are more or less the same, except able to send data at different rates (a maximum of 100MB/sec for ATA-100). An ATA-100 controller is also backwards-compatible, so you can run older ATA drives, Zip drives, CDROM drives, and so forth off the same controller.

Make sure that you have the BIOS set to Autodetect the drive type, and quickly double-check that the jumpers are set correctly. Can you use the port for other drives? It sounds as if you could have a defective ATA-100 controller - one final thing to try is to download updates for your motherboard from the Asus site (www.asus.com.tw).

Currently drive speeds are approaching the limit of the Ultra ATA/66 standard, and in coming months, we can expect to see drives capable of exceeding 70MB/sec in burst data transfers. Ultra ATA/100 was released by Quantum early in 2000 because it was expected that drives would quickly exceed the 66MB/sec transfer benchmark.

Q> AUTORUN HASSLES

I've recently bought my first computer and have gone nuts buying and trying games. I noticed that when I insert a CD into its drive it starts up automatically which is what I believe is called 'auto start' (see I am new to

computers), but have just installed Longbow 2 and for some reason its disabled the auto run feature and it's getting really annoying having to open my computer and find the right icon to click on to get the game going.

As I said, I'm new to computers and is quite a hit and miss affair. I've been into the System area and clicked on the CD ROM tab and checked the auto insert notification box but this didn't work. I know this is a silly and trivial question, but I would really like to know how to get that feature back up and running.

Anonymous

A> When you installed the game, the installer disabled the autorun feature because the autorun software is set to load the installation program (which you only need to do once). The easiest way to be able to get the game running quickly and easily when you want to is to copy a shortcut for the program onto your desktop (right-click on the program icon and drag it to the desktop, then select "Create Shortcut here").

Q> ALMOST BLACK & WHITE

I recently bought Black & White and installed it to my PC, but when I go to run the game it crashes. It goes to the fullscreen, shows the two logos at the start, then goes black and doesn't respond. My system is: AMD K7 motherboard
AMD Thunderbird 800MHz
256MB RAM; 20GB HDD; 50xCD
nVidia RIVA TNT2 Model 64
Soundblaster VIBRA
Please help me. I really want to play this game after hearing the good news about it!

Mike

A> The first thing that you should do is make sure that you have no extra programs loaded from the tray in the right hand corner of the taskbar (you can also press ctrl-alt-del from within Windows and kill applications apart from "Explorer" and "Systray"). If it works now, then you've got a conflict between a running application and Black & White, and you will have to do clean reboots each time you want to play

the game. If this still doesn't work, then try updating your video and soundcard drivers, and even DirectX. The Detonator 3 drivers for the nVidia cards provide substantial framerate boosts over previous versions, and they can be downloaded from www.nvidia.com. You can also get updated Vibra drivers from www.creative.com.au. DirectX is currently at version 8, and can be found on PCPP coverdiscs, or from www.microsoft.com.

Q> HEADING PLSSSSSSSS

I get two error messages every time I shut down or restart the computer. The first one is 'Msgsrv32 illegal operation...', and the second one is a 'General Protection Fault in Module cm8330sb.drv'. Can you please shed some light on what these errors are, and how to fix them?

Kenneth

A> This one is caused by your soundcard, and indicates that you have a corrupted soundcard driver. You will need to replace it, and can do so by going to the Control Panel, then clicking on System, and then "Device Manager". This will give you a list of your computer's contents, and you can expand the "Sound, Video and Game Controllers" element to view a list of the soundcard drivers installed on your machine. Click on your soundcard, and select "Properties", then click on the "Driver" tab. Here you should click "Update Driver", to either reinstall the one that came with your soundcard, or download a new one from the internet. To do the latter, go to your soundcard's homepage (www.creative.com.au). Following the driver installation wizard to its conclusion, you will be asked to reboot the computer, which should henceforth run without the errors on shut-down or restart.

Q> HEADING PLSSSSSSSS

I am just about to buy the new AMD Athlon 1200 CPU. The problem is this: I have an ASUS A7M board which supports the new 266MHz

LETTER OF THE MONTH

LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS...

AN INCREDIBLE SIDEWINDER GAMEVOICE ONLINE COMMUNICATION PERIPHERAL, COURTESY OF THE NICE PEOPLE AT MICROSOFT. HURRAH FOR THAT!

Q> BOILING YOUR CHIPS

Oh hail ye who knows all of the fiddly bits in my gaming rig. May I ask thee a question? I have recently purchased myself a gaming rig: Athlon 1GHz, Asus A7V133, Asus V7700 Geforce2 GTS 32MB, 256Mb RAM.

Anyway, my friend had no trouble putting it all together and all went as planned. We switched her on and everything seemed to work well. Until we went into the BIOS and looked at the CPU temperature. From just having it turned on in BIOS for about 10mins with the case off, it was giving a incredible temperature of 97 degreesC! This caused my friend and I to jump out of our seats and begin to fan vigorously to try and prevent my \$450 chip from fusing itself to the motherboard or even just taking years off its life. We then checked the heatsink and fan to make sure they are operational and everything seemed in order (the heatsink and fan is standard from the store we bought them from who told us the chip should run at max about 70degrees).

I have a 12 month warranty on the chip and took it back to the store declaring a fault. They tested it on their own system and it read off as running a normal 45degrees in BIOS. They gave me the chip back and told me their

must be some other problem. I'm stumped... Could it be my motherboard?

I have tried running Windows but eventually it spits the dummy because of the high temperatures being detected. I have even tried underclocking it to make it run at a lower temperature, but this doesn't work either. Any help would be very much appreciated

InTeL^666MHz^

A> It sounds very much as if your diagnosis was right, and there is an extremely good chance that the motherboard is to blame for the high temperature. There are kilometres of wires coded onto a motherboard, and it only takes one faulty connection to render it useless. It is also possible that you have a faulty RAM module, and if possible it might be a good idea to try running the computer with different RAM installed to try and isolate the



problem. As the technician was able to run the chip at normal operational temperature when it was plugged into another motherboard, we would suggest looking at your motherboard first.

We recently came across a motherboard that seemed to generate a lot of heat around the RAM slots, and we found that the motherboard itself had a small crack in it upon closer inspection, which was shorting out a wire near the RAM.

Of course, when you are trying to trace the source of the problems, pay close attention to the temperature of the CPU, and shut off the power as soon as it reaches a high level.

FSB. The company sells both the Athlon 1200/200 and the Athlon 1200/266. How can I tell that I am getting the latter?

Name

A> If you buy the chip from a good supplier, it will be boxed, and printed on the box will be the chip's specifications. If you decide to give the motherboard to your computer supplier to install the chip himself, you can see when you boot the computer during the initial POST (power-on self test). On the BIOS information screen, the motherboard's FSB will be reported.

Q> BURNING QUESTIONS

I have a Mitsumi 4082TE Burner (I know you hate people that copy games and I couldn't agree with you more - I always buy my games) and every time I try to back up the latest games I always get a message "PLEASE INSERT

DISC". This is really frustrating for me as I have a younger brother who scratches my games. Do all the latest burners prevent this from happening. I have Nero 5, CloneCD and Easy CD Creator.

Daniel M.

A> The problem is not actually with your burner, or with any of your hardware at all. The fact is that many modern games have on-disc copy protection, so even after you duplicate the discs, they will not run, as there is data on the original disc that can't be copied. One common method for game developers to use was to flag a few sectors on the CD as bad (even though they contained vital data), so when the disc was copied, it would not copy the data 'hidden' in the bad tracks. With data laws changing recently, it is currently illegal to run a crack on your computer, so you can't copy the game

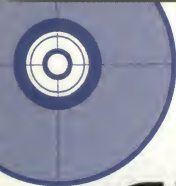
and then crack it - even if you have purchased the original game. We would strongly suggest keeping your CDs (and indeed anything else fragile) away from the hands of your brother.

Q> HEADING PLSSSSSSSS

What does 'slot one' mean? I thought that Pentium 3's are slot one, but in your article on motherboards the Pentium 3 boards look the same as the Athlon and Duron boards?

Antony

A> Socket A (AMD Athlon and Duron) run at a different FSB speed and different voltage to the Slot 1 chips (Intel Pentium II and above). Despite the fact that at first glance they do indeed look the same, the pin count is different - and you won't be able to get a Socket A CPU into a Slot 1 CPU-slot (and even if you could, it wouldn't work).



CD POWERPLAY^{#62}



HAIL, GOOD FELLOW!

Okay so this month's CD isn't so strongly themed as last time but hey, there's so many new demos and games out there it was tough enough deciding what went on and what stayed off, let alone think up some fancy schmancy topic for y'all... sorry I haven't had my coffee yet. Anyway, check out Iwar2 and Z2 - anything with a 2 in the title is fully sick mate. Also, check out this Beachhead 2000 thing - I know it's a year late but I like it because it's really tasteless. Later!

cdtech@pcpowerplay.com.au

Faulty CDs will be replaced free of charge. Send it (no postage required), together with a description of the error, to:

PC PowerPlay CD Returns

Reply Paid 634, 78 Renwick St

Redfern NSW 2016

DEMOS CD1

Beach Head 2000



BEACH HEAD 2000

As a lone gunner you are the last defence against an overwhelming onslaught of enemy fire. Keep a steady aim and blast away at land, sea, and air forces as they rush you from every conceivable direction. Engage yourself in limitless levels of white-knuckle action, stunning photo-realistic graphics and earth shaking sound effects. Clear the beach, defend your post, and pray that the supply plane comes in time!

SETTLERS IV

Morbus is an instigator with decidedly darker ambitions and because he instigates a revolt against HIM, the highest of the gods, he is called upon to receive his punishment. He is banned to the most horrible place in the universe that he can possibly imagine - Earth. Morbus hates everything that is green! As soon as he arrives on Earth, Morbus and his "Dark Tribe" begin their battle against earthly greenery and the Settler world.

AKIMBO: KUNG-FU HERO

Akimbo: Kung-Fu Hero features a Manga-inspired lead character that can perform a variety of kung-fu moves including punches, sidekicks, back flips, and round house kicks that will help you battle and puzzle your way through a wealth of colourful levels.

LEGENDS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

Legends of Might and Magic takes you on a dark journey of struggle and

conquest. In order to succeed, you must team up with other adventurers to halt the advancement of the opposing legion and rewrite history. Travel to distant worlds of epic fantasy- filled lands, perilous dungeons and bloodstained battlefields. Join a troop of courageous heroes to battle the forces of darkness, or brawl alongside evil cohorts bent on destruction and chaos. Battle hundreds of creatures and recover unknown treasures as you strive to be crowned champion.

REDMOON

RedMoon is a massive multiplayer online game that transports the player into an original anime-style science fantasy world. Through a mix of technology, magic, and martial arts, players can find a variety of action and combat scenarios. Coupling pre- and post-cataclysmic settings spanning the past, present, and future, your character embarks on a journey from urban Earth, through deserts and mountains to the distant planet of Signus.

Note: This is a beta version. Once released, the software continues to be free with a monthly subscription fee required after the first 30 days of play.

F/A-18 KOREA GOLD

Fly head to head or in teams over the internet (up to four players). Destroy enemy air defense, maintain air



superiority, support ground units and destroy hostile aircraft. Take the challenge of this award-winning game.

CLIVE BARKER'S UNDYING

In his writing and films, Clive Barker has inspired, fascinated, and utterly terrified his audience. Bringing his unique talent and vision to PC

gaming, Clive Barker's Undying is a first person shooter that delivers an unparalleled tale of horror. Summoned by an old friend, you are Patrick Galloway, master of the occult, armed with the dark knowledge of arcane magic and a six-shot weapon of forged metal grace. You must unravel the curse of the Covenant family... or die trying.

SPOTLIGHT CD1

Z: STEEL SOLDIERS

This fantastic 3D arcade/strategy lets you control thirty unit types and twenty building types to create your naval, air, and robotic army of power. Highly realistic

3D landscapes, unique localised life forms, and the game's own environmental system takes this a step beyond your average realtime strategy game.



PLAY HUNDREDS OF PLAYSTATION® GAMES ON YOUR COMPUTER!



Bleem! has been a hit with thousands of copies sold worldwide and is now available in Australia.

www.bleem.com.au

DEMO CONTROLS



Legends of Might and Magic

SETTLERS IV

All controls are via the mouse. Play the in-game tutorials for detailed instructions.

UNDYING

Weapon Fire - Left Mouse button
Weapon Select - E
Spell Fire - Right Mouse button
Spell Select - R
Weapon Action - Alt
Move Forward - W
Move Backward - S
Strafe/Sidestep Left - A
Strafe/Sidestep Right - D
Duck - C
Jump - Space
Cycle Inventory - F,V
Use Inventory Item - Q
Cycle Weapon - 1,2, Mousewheel
Cycle Spell - 3,4
QuickSave - F6
QuickLoad - F7
View Journal - F3

CONFLICT ZONE

Controlling units
Selecting units and buildings is done with the left mouse button. Orders are given with the right mouse button.
F1 - show/hide the list of current keyboard shortcuts

I-WAR 2: EDGE OF CHAOS

Keyboard Only Control Style Reference

FLIGHT

Pitch UP - Keypad 8
Pitch DOWN - Keypad 2
Yaw LEFT - Keypad 4
Yaw RIGHT - Keypad 6
Roll LEFT - Keypad 1
Roll RIGHT - Keypad 2
Manual Forward Thruster - W
Manual Reverse Thruster - S
Slide LEFT - A
Slide RIGHT - D

ThrusterSpeed - Keypad +/-
Lateral Thrusters - ALT + Keypad 2/4/6/8
Hold for Free-Flight mode - CTRL + Keypad 5
Toggle Assisted/Free-Flight - N
LDS flight mode on/off - L
Undock - U

CONTACTS/TARGETING

Next Contact Filter Mode - M
Previous Contact Filter Mode - SHIFT + M
Cycle Contacts UP - >
Cycle Contacts DOWN - <
Select Target - T
Subtarget selected ships systems - Y
Set Target as to our last attacker - Q

Set Target as nearest enemy - R
Target next enemy - E
Attempt remote log-on to target - SHIFT + R

WEAPONS

Fire weapon - SPACE
Cycle primary weapon - ENTER
Cycle secondary weapon - BACKSPACE
Cycle Next Weapon -]

LEGENDS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

Mouse

Mouse Movement - Look in any direction
Button 1 - Primary attack
Button 2 - Secondary attack
Wheel - Display the weapon list

Keyboard

Strafe left/right - A/D
Move forward/backwards - W/S
Use item - E
Jump - SPACE
Crouch - Left CTRL
Buy item at the beginning of the round - B
Drop current weapon - G
Talk - T
Team Talk - Y
Team Commands - Z
Current Player Statistics screen - TAB

Z - STEEL SOLDIERS

BASIC CONTROLS

Select - LMB
Build, Order & Attack Menus - RMB
Deselect / reselect - SPACE
Add/Remove from selection - SHIFT + LMB
Default action - LMB
Stack order - SHIFT + LMB
Force fire - CTRL + LMB
Multiple attack - CTRL + LMB
Rotate Structure left / right - < / >
Force move - ALT + LMB
Select onscreen - O
Create Group - CTRL + 0-9
Select Group - 0 - 9
Scatter - X
Guard - G
Set rally point - R
In-Game Menu - ESC
Pause - P

Help System - H
Scroll map - RMB
Zoom view - Mouse Whl, Pgup, PgDn

FA-18 KOREA GOLD

Aircraft

Keypad 4 - Aileron Left
Keypad 6 - Aileron Right
Keypad 8 - Elevator Down
Keypad 5 - Elevator Up
, - Rudder Left
/ - Rudder Center
. - Rudder Right
= - Increase Thrust
- - Decrease Thrust
Backspace/Delete - Afterburner
Spacebar - Speed Brake/Wheel Brakes
G - Gear
F - Flaps
H - Hook
shift D - Dump Fuel
shift F - Refuel
shift S - Service (refuel/rearm)
shift E - Eject
D - Damage Display
E - Engine Display

Navigation

A - Autopilot Toggle
shift A - Autopilot Mode Cycle
W - Waypoint Cycle
T - TACAN Cycle
L - ILS Toggle
M - Moving Map/Scale
N - Navigation/HSI Scale

Wingman Commands

(shift modifies commands for wingman #2)
Engagement
F1 - Help Me
F2 - Engage/Protect
F3 - Resume Mission
F4 - Go Home

Attack Formations

F5 - Bracket Left
F6 - Bracket Right
F7 - Split High
F8 - Split Low

Standard Formations

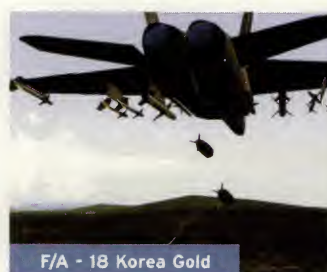
F9 - Echelon
F10 - Trail
F11 - Combat Spread
F12 - Lead



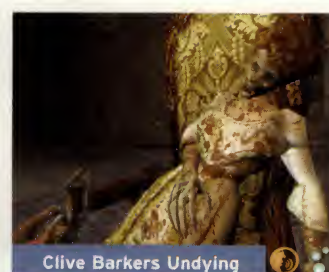
I-War 2



Conflict Zone



F/A - 18 Korea Gold



Clive Barkers Undying

DEMO CD2

CONFLICT ZONE

It's early 21st century and the majority of the world's countries have created the International Corps for Peace, an organisation dedicated to bringing about world peace. However, not all countries are keen to be involved and these persist in generating conflicts through the organisation GHOST. A secret organisation, which warrants only the economic interests of its members without any attachment to morals, GHOST, does not hesitate to create crisis situations with the goal of destabilising the world-wide equilibrium and endanger any chance of peace. You get to Control either ICP or GHOST, offering 2 very different gameplays and strategies.

DESTRUCTION

You run around in a maze (with destructible walls) and collect items, fight against your opponent and against tanks. You start with 2 extra lives. Last man standing wins the round. In between rounds you buy weapons, ammo etc, etc. The main object is to win as many rounds as possible, though you often care a lot more about getting money. As you buy things you grow mightier and it gets easier to earn more money, especially by destroying tanks.



SPOTLIGHT CD2

I-WAR 2: EDGE OF CHAOS

It is the twenty fourth century. Mankind has extended its reach to the stars. Those lucky enough to live in the core systems enjoy a life of opulence and luxury. However far from Earth, and its notions of justice, oppressive forces rule the frontier of known space with an iron fist. In the Badlands life is a cheap and

tradable commodity. Now, one mans murder will set in motion events that could one day lead to freedom from oppression; or lead humanity to certain annihilation. Edge of Chaos is a space simulation game that joins state-of-the-art 3D graphics and physics technology with realistic, believable characters and a engrossing storyline.



Conflict Zone

GAMEPLAY CD2

UNREAL FORTRESS V600

Unreal Fortress is now at version 600 and with this update comes over one hundred bug fixes plus more! Nine new maps, four new weapons, and increased stability with reduced lag are only a few things that are new.

HALF-LIFE COUNTER-STRIKE V1.1

Counter-Strike is a modification to the excellent game, Half-Life. It modifies the multiplayer aspects of Half-Life to allow more team-oriented gameplay. In Counter-Strike, the player experiences what a trained counter-terrorist unit or terrorist unit experiences. We've included the upgrade as well as the full version.

QUAKE 3 TEAM ARENA MAP PACK

This map pack contains four team-style maps approved for use with id Software's Quake III: Team Arena. Their creators are some of the most talented mapmakers in the Quake community. Working together with id designer Paul Jaquays, Quake3World Level Editing forum moderator AstroCreep, Mr. Elusive, the bot AI

programmer for both Quake III Arena and Quake III: Team Arena, and Drunken Boxer, Quake3World Capture the Flag and Team Arena forum moderator, these artisans have created some truly fine playgrounds for Team Arena.

PRIVATEER ORIGIN (1993)



Three AM, Monday morning.

I'm three jumps out from Junction with a pack of Talons on my six and shields are at twenty per cent. I have used all my missiles except for one Dumb Fire and I haven't got around to buying an afterburner yet. I know if I can just make it to Junction it's only a short hop back to Troy and a safe mining base where I can get a little sorely need R&R. The only problem is I blasted a crippled Pirate three jumps ago and

tractored in the ejected pilot to sell as a slave, so I have to avoid any Militia patrols or they will scan me, spot the contraband, and I'm as good as dead.

Starting the game with nothing but a dashing auburn hairstyle, a dashing eyebrow scar and a dilapidated spaceship left to you by your grandfather, your initial motive in Privateer (1993) was simply to exist. Alone on a remote mining base in Troy system with a scant handful of credits, there wasn't even enough cash to buy a Jump Drive to get the hell back to some kind of civilisation. Fortunately a mission computer in the echoing main

chamber of the base offered numerous randomly generated opportunities to make your fortune, and from there it was free-form gaming all the way to a dingy bar on New Detroit where a shady character named Ernesto Sandoval offered you a strange artefact and a lucrative courier mission, thus beginning the quest for the Steltek Gun.

With four different ships, a dozen weapons and upgrades and a competent commodity exchange system, Privateer was a worthy mid-nineties update to Elite. You could literally fly around forever doing random missions and only dip back

into the main plot now and again. All the classic sprite-based Wing Commander combat was there, except it was a hell of a lot harder, and for once you could legitimately blow up Confed 'Paradigm-class' cruisers. Like Black & White, Privateer had an alignment system, so if you destroyed enough Militia Gladioluses, Pirates would start buying you drinks.

In a time when the Wing Commander franchise was starting to stagnate (WC Academy, anyone?) and before the Mark Hamill nonsense of WC3, Privateer was a welcome nugget in an otherwise poor vein.

Anthony Fordham



REVIEWS

Master of Orion 2 (92%)
Harpoon 97 (90%)
Discworld 2 (88%)

THE ARCHIVE

FIVE YEARS AS AUSTRALIA'S AUTHORITY
ON PC GAMING

PCPP#10 FEBRUARY/MARCH 1997

There must be an unwritten law in game magazine publishing stating that, in order for a magazine to be at all successful, it is necessary to shamelessly festoon it once a year with either images of semi-clad women or Star Wars. Having failed to meet these requirements in an earlier issue by trying to pass off a multi-armed Hindu goddess as a 'scantily clad woman', PCPP grew desperate in the early days of 1997 and took wholeheartedly to the only other option available. A Star Wars fighter, a Star Wars font and a not-so-Star Wars picture of some not-so-Star Wars-but-still-kinda-exciting steering wheels combined to cover a mag featuring stories on new Star Wars games, new steering wheel peripherals and something about 1996 being the best gaming year in all history. Ben was happy, March was pleased and David sat around waiting for the then non-existent Ion Storm to hurry up and make the then non-existent Deus Ex. But how did the readers find it? Well, if they forgave us for putting a Leisure Suit Larry game on the CD, we're pretty sure that they liked it. Not only did it contain previews for LucasArts games that weren't sullied by the unwashable dirt that is Force Commander, but it had a section on 3D graphics accelerators and the future they promised. In fact, it is because of this article and the helpful glossary within that gamers Australia wide were able to go to school, uni or work and explain to their peers what terms like 'Z-buffering' and 'Mip-Mapping' meant.

"You idiots don't have a clue WHO you're dealing with"

Dr Derek Smart Phd dealing with the disgruntled unfortunates who purchased Battlecruiser 3000

PS2

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YOUR GUIDE TO 2001 AND BEYOND!

HYPER»

ALL THE GAMES — ALL THE SYSTEMS



SIM CELIBACY

I'm a solitary sort of fellow. Apart from the boots of course, who are with me always, it's rare to find me in any sort of company. Nevertheless, I do have a very select group which I have, over the years, knitted closely into the jaggedy-arse fabric of my soul. There's my crazy ex-third flatmate, of course. And the manager of the local EB who rather amusingly hides in the back room every time I walk into the shop and attempt to pass off another review copy as a return. But above all these is The Girl. And The Relationship.

See, The Problem - which is part of The Relationship - is that The Girl doesn't like games. Or gaming. The boots assure me she actually likes gaming a lot less than games, because games are

in shrink-wrapped boxes on shelves while gaming is in her living room. Oh yes, the boots and I live with The Girl, The Relationship and The Problem all in the one very cramped house. Well, it's more of a flat really. Okay, it's a cellar. But it has carpet. In some of the rooms.

Very occasionally I snap out of my counter-struck daze and realise The Girl is a person too, and a person who must share a tiny corner of the living room with not only The Relationship and The Problem, but also the Mysterious Underwear and Pornographic Video Collection of my now departed crazy ex-third flatmate. The reason all these people have to share the one tiny corner of the room is that The Computer takes up most of the rest of the main living area of our semi-carpeted cellar, and those other parts of the cellar that are in fact

carpeted are reserved for pieces of sensitive electronic equipment such as my DVD player and the PSX with the half-arsed chipping job which also once belonged to my crazy ex-third flatmate but which now seems to belong to a thriving colony of American Cockroaches. So, in this one cellar, live myself, the boots, The Girl, The Relationship, The Problem, the Mysterious Underwear and Pornographic Video Collection of the crazy ex-third flatmate, not to mention the semi-chipped PlayStation and DVD player, as well as The Computer and the American Cockroaches, and it's



DR CLAW LIVES



This image of a rather unamused cat is a sort of tribute to dr claw who I understand gets a lot of flak from the readers, but I'm right with Anthony Fordham here in saying that dr claw is more to be pitied than blamed, especially after his latest beating. After all, they don't call our editor WILDgoose for nothing now do they? Anyway, the boots thought a sort of agony column could be interesting - for us - so if you have any difficult personal problems, why not send them in an email to pcpp_yellowboots@yahoo.com.au? By the way, to the person who registered yellowboots as a yahoo nickname: the boots are gunning for you.

because of this that I came home one night to find that The Girl had taken to both the PlayStation and the DVD player with a new resident of the cellar, namely The Fire Axe and was now lying prone on the couch catching her breath before starting on The Computer.

It was far too late for the cockroaches, but fortunately for The Computer I had a copy of The Sims which the manager of the local EB had refused to accept as a return on the grounds that it was a special edition not yet available in Australia. Plus it had Demonstration Copy, Not For Resale written on the cover. Would that my winning ways had indeed won him over, because now The Girl is so single-mindedly obsessed with The Sims, I am the one who crouches forgotten and cold in the lonely corner of the room proscribed by the once-admonishing back of the sofa, with only my crazy ex-third flatmate's pornographic video collection for company. And thanks to The Sims, this pile of rotting VHS is as close to real sex as I am going to get for a very long time.

NEXT MONTH...

• THE FUTURE OF GAMES

PCPP reports back from E3 with news of all the hottest games in development

• REVIEWS

Next month looks like an incredible time for games. Diablo II: Lord of Destruction, Emperor: Battle for Dune, Commandos 2, Alone in the Dark 4, Operation Flashpoint, Baldur's Gate 2: Throne of Bhaal...

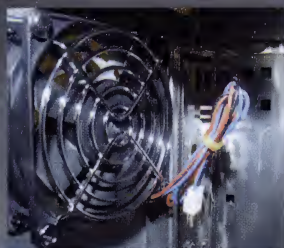
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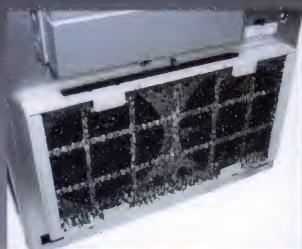


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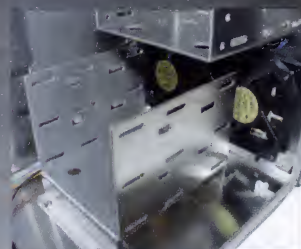
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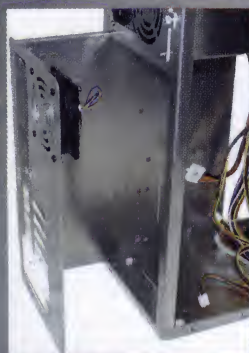
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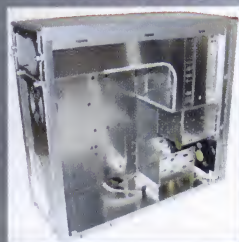
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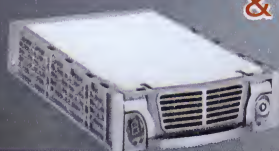


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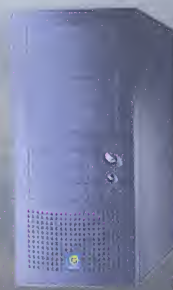


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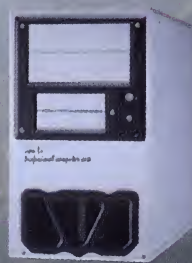
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